



HARDEN HALL.



VOL. II.

HARDEN HALL ;

OR,

THE THREE PROPOSALS.

A Nobel.

EDITED BY THE HON. F—— B——

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“ While memory watches o’er the sad review,  
Of joys that faded like the morning dew ;  
Peace may depart—and life and nature seem,  
A barren path—a wildness and a dream.”

CAMPBELL.

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IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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CHAPTER I.

No clue could be obtained to discover who had robbed the late Mrs. Read of so many things; though no doubt could be entertained that it was the act of the nurse. The funeral was over; the house passed away into other hands, and Arthur would have stood quite alone in the wide world, and friendless, had not Miss Allen, who had become much interested in, and attached to him, made use of every argument to induce her father to give him a home: not that he required much persuasion to do what had been his own desire ever since he had first seen the poor boy; still, as the father of a large family, he felt it his duty to hesitate, and consider if he could, without injuring

them, adopt little Arthur as another son. After maturely considering all the *pros and cons* of the matter, he called his daughter to him and asked her whether she would like to give up her singing-master for a whole year?

"Most willingly, dearest father," she said, "if that will enable you to adopt little Arthur."

Pleased as he was at this devotion of her own pleasures to one who, in all probability, would never be able to repay any part of the sacrifice, her father felt it his duty to lay before his child, in the strongest terms, the several pleasures she would have to give up. Music was her chief delight; gifted with a rich powerful voice, she had, for the first time this year, been taking lessons of a celebrated proficient. It was not merely to herself that this charming talent was a great pleasure; it was so to all her family, and especially to her father it was the greatest: when he returned home, tired and exhausted with the fatigues of the day, it refreshed him then to listen to her sweet melodious voice. The last six months had taken away all that roughness which is generally perceptible in female voices before they are well

cultivated ; and Miss Allen had hoped, by being well instructed for the next half year, to have perfected herself in this most enchanting of all accomplishments. Now it would be necessary that she should devote the greatest part of her time to attending to her little *protégé*, who was ill and delicate, and required all her care and attention. Her walks with her brothers must be curtailed to enable her to accompany Arthur ; her bed-room must be made smaller by a partition to afford room for the child. All these, and many other little every-day trifles, did Dr. Allen enumerate : not to dissuade his daughter from doing what he felt was her duty, but to show her that she must not expect everything to be *couleur de rose* ; that she would probably have, at times, to correct him, and that her time would no longer be strictly her own. She smilingly replied, that she had thought of all these things ; that she still wished to see, if she could in any way supply a mother's place to the poor child ; and she fervently thanked her kind father for allowing her to take charge of the interesting boy. Accordingly it was settled he should return with her the following day.

CHAPTER II.

WHILE these sad scenes are passing, what has become of him, who was the cause of all the grief and sorrow that this once fair form,—alas! now a pale corpse—had borne so meekly, so angelically. He was, to use a hackneyed expression, enjoying himself; delighted to get rid of his aunt, if it was only for a few hours. The morning had been wet and stormy; heavy grey clouds succeeded each other in the east, so that the sun had not made its appearance: there was a chilliness, a mistiness in the air, generally indicative of rain. But it was not Mr. Read's vocation ever to admire the early dawn, even though the sun shone its brightest; so that this morning he felt even less inclined than usual to rise, when his Italian servant came in, to announce that his morning meal was ready. Eleven o'clock came before he could make up his mind to rise; then rousing

himself, he rang a little silver bell, which stood near, and desired the black-haired Italian to light him a cigar. The man came back quickly, saying, that there was a large carriage at the door, "full," he continued, "full of di gentleman. Yes, sir, quite full of di gentleman; and they do wish, sir, that you would go with them to di races, or di something like that, signor."

"Oh, the Derby! By Jove, I had forgotten it was Epsom to-day. Epsom! why, the deuce, did you not tell me this before?"

"Mon Dieu, sir! and what I know di Epsom? Me never know it before."

"Well, then, hold your tongue, and get me up as quickly as you can. Here, stop, go to the door, and give my compliments to Mr. Ponsonby, and say I shall be with him in five minutes."

The cigar was thrown aside; and he proceeded in his toilette. All this time the rain was beating against the windows dismally enough: the wind howled in the chimney; and it certainly did not appear to be an inviting morning to take a country drive. Mr. Read shrugged his shoulders, and thought to himself what his aunt would say when she heard he was gone off to Epsom; for her last

injunction had been, not to leave his house till she had seen him.

Another and another message, more pressing than the first, were brought to him from the impatient young men outside, to make haste, or they should miss the Derby. In vain he swore at his faithful foreigner: in vain they both toiled at his toilette—quicker they could not be; and another message was given, to say, that unless he made haste, they should go away without him.

“Here! stop, fellow! I am just coming.”

So saying, with his coral pin in one hand, white kid gloves and gold-headed cane in the other, he rushed out of the room, after his footman—reached the carriage—was hauled in, amidst exclamations of, “Well, I hope you have not hurried yourself!”—“I trust you will not be worse, old fellow, for your early rising!” and, in some instances, with a hearty, good-humoured, “Well, how are you?—Glad you are coming with us!”

However, young Read was not one to be abashed by this sort of thing. He made the best of it; and, concluding all the party must rejoice in the addition of his company, made himself comfortable.

Conceited people have one very great advantage over their more humble-minded neighbours: they always imagine that every one is pleased to see them, and feel at their ease everywhere, and in every society; whilst others, ten times more deserving, sit twiddling their finger and thumb, fearing that they are *de trop*, or that some of their companions would rather have their room than their company: worrying themselves by their very considerateness. The rain seemed half inclined to leave off, and the youngsters were congratulating themselves on their good luck, when a clap of thunder was heard, and three or four large drops slowly fell. Immediately there was a commotion all over the vehicle, some calling for cloaks, some for umbrellas; till by the time the rain descended quickly they were all pretty well covered up, and so good humoured and jolly, that Mr. Read felt quite glad to be with them.

In the course of conversation he heard Miss Selby's name mentioned, and immediately became all attention. It was not much that he heard: merely that she was very pretty, very difficult to get a sight of, and still more difficult to catch. She was, the young man went on to say, very re-

served and cautious; not like the usual run of young ladies, on the look out for homes of their own, but quite happy as she was, and by no means inclined to enter into the wedded state! All the party laughed as Charles Webb said this. He was a comical fellow, and his good humour and merry laugh were so irresistible, that all the young men joined in a hearty chorus; and he continued, turning round to Augustus Read, "I hear you are trying to catch this fair lady—this *new light of our days*. Well, I take it, old boy, you will not succeed: but we will have our fortunes told to-day, and see what comes of it." Mr. Read was hardly shrewd enough to enter fully into this joke: however, he laughed, and his gay companion rattled on about something else.

They had not proceeded far from town, when the concourse of people and numerous vehicles rather delayed their progress. Among the crowds hastening to the scene of action, were some whose countenances did not speak much in their favour, and with them were seen a few of the wandering gipsy tribe. One gipsy in particular, with her fine black hair braided round her head, attracted the attention of the young men. She was

strikingly handsome, and her complexion a clear olive brown, seldom now seen among the degenerate remnant of gipsies of our day ; but she was apparently a foreigner, and born under a warmer and more genial clime. Her eyes were large and black, with that soft melting expression which is never observed in those of a different colour. She held a small guitar in her hand, and when on perceiving that she attracted the decided attention of the young men (what woman, be her station what it may, has not tact enough soon to discover this?) she struck up a lively *patois* song. So correct and true were all her notes, that Grisi herself might have admired its simple melody. She received a shower of silver in return for her song, and Charles Webb shouted out, "Can you tell fortunes? I want my fortune told." On her nodding assent, they desired her to find the carriage out on the course.

"Ah ! mon dieu, je vous trouverai. Adieu, au revoir ;" and waving her hand to the carriage, with infinite grace, she disappeared amidst the crowd.

"Now," exclaimed our chattering friend, "Read shall have his fortune told, and see if

the stars are propitious: eh? what do you say, Read, are there any obstacles?" and he smiled significantly at him. But seeing Mr. Read's look of extreme annoyance and ill-concealed embarrassment, he said, "Well, well, my good fellow, never mind; you know its my way to laugh at my friends;" and he laughed again till the tears came into his eyes. "You know, very well, I wish you all manner of happiness with your wife, if Miss Selby is to be such. But, good heavens, what is the matter! I really am grieved if I have hurt you. Why, Read, you are as pale as death; here, give me your hand, and cheer up, old boy."

Not being blest with the best temper imaginable, our hero found it rather difficult to bear this joking; but after a few attempts, succeeded so far, that all attention was drawn away from him. Every moment added to the difficulty of getting on; huge omnibuses, ponderous vans: every kind of vehicle, in short, from the handsome, dashing barouche and four to the crazy old gig driven by some rosy old dame calling oranges, choked up the highway. The driver of our party was a first rate whip, and dashed in and out so well, that they

reached the course in good time. News had just arrived that her Majesty intended honouring the races with her presence, which caused great excitement, and animated pleasure sparkled in every eye. A handsome stand had been erected for the Queen's reception.

"Now, come, go a-head," exclaimed a tall, fair man, to Mr. Ponsonby; "go a-head, man, and get in, just opposite the grand stand on the hill side; we shall see capitally. Why the deuce don't you drive on? By Jove, man, another drag will annihilate us if you don't take care. Ponsonby, don't you hear?"

"Why, my good fellow," exclaimed Ponsonby, laughing; "what is the matter? do take things coolly; nothing to be got by blustering. Don't you see that opening between the blue barouche and the old yellow family coach? Well, it seems to me," he continued, pondering each word as if he had been sitting comfortably in his own house; "well, it seems to me, that that is exactly the place for us. You see," he continued, turning abruptly towards Read, who had his head out of window; you see, we shall be near her Majesty's stand; and if report speaks true,

——” his voice was drowned in the surrounding din, and Mr. Read heard no more.

By the time their huge carriage was well placed and the horses taken off, it was near the hour for the Derby to start. Thronged as Epsom course generally is, it was even more so than usual this spring; it appeared as if the people sprung up like mushrooms in all directions; as far as the eye could reach was one enormous mass of human beings. Thousands of riders, which added greatly to the animation of the whole scene—thousands of pedestrians—thousands of carriages—wherever the eye roamed over, the same interminable mass of human beings was seen.

The Queen had not yet arrived, but was momentarily expected: suddenly a loud cheer was given from the further end of the course; it was taken up and passed along the whole line: that cheer, which spoke volumes to her who excited it, spoke the true feelings of love and loyalty with which the bulk of her people regarded their anointed sovereign.

It died away, and was again renewed; and a third cheer, more heart-stirring than the preceding one, was given, as her Majesty descended from the carriage and entered the

stand, bowing repeatedly to all near her, with much grace and condescension.

Miss Selby was in attendance; and Mr. Webb exclaimed, "Well, Read, by Jove! your beauty is a fine girl: suppose I rival you?"

But at that moment the bell sounded, and the Derby was being run. All eyes were turned in that direction. Many a bet was made by pretty young ladies with gentlemen, of gloves, and so forth; and by rash youths, of guineas they would have found it hard to pay.

"Yellow cap has it!—yellow cap has it!" cried Charles Webb, flushed with excitement.

"No, no, red cap has it!"

"Red! yellow—yellow!" resounded on all sides: one and all appeared intensely interested in the issue. The bell rang, and the number hung out showed plainly that young Webb was right, and that yellow cap had won.

In one moment the whole course was alive with pedestrians. It is certainly an extraordinary sight the moment the Derby is over: the instantaneous movement is marvellous: not a creature appears stationary. The stand was one mass of men; and riders dashed in and out

of the carriages, in the greatest excitement. As for Charles Webb, he sat down and laughed so heartily, that, as usual, the infection extended to the other young men.

“And now for some grog. I am as hungry as a hunter. Racing is so near akin to hunting, that one may well be allowed to feel hungry.”

Loud laughter succeeded this speech. Hams, chickens, tongues, soon made their appearance — and disappearance: the champagne circulated pretty freely, and the whole party were in high good humour. Even Mr. Read, as he sat down, could not help wishing he had always lived more with men: he bitterly lamented his early marriage, and that his artful aunt, by all her machinations, had obtained such influence over him.

Our party were busily engaged in their repast, when the notes of a guitar were heard; and, making a sign to Ponsonby to keep up the conversation, Charles Webb beckoned the dark-haired musician to the carriage. She appeared more flushed and excited than in the morning, as he obtained a nearer view of her; but her eyes still had that melting expression which had not been lost on

his merry heart; and she saw with pleasure that she was not forgotten. In broken English she apologised for having so long delayed getting to the carriage; and with all the gesticulation and vivacity of a Frenchwoman, related her several adventures at other carriages.

Charles Webb was apparently bewitched with the cunning gipsy; and calling her close to him, bade her tell his fortune: while apparently all attention to her—laughing with the others at the different absurdities she repeated, and amused at the extreme good fortune which she predicted as his lot—he urged her to tell Mr. Read's fortune, pointing him out, and dropping a few words. Quickly she caught at their drift; and with an expressive look and shake of her head, sang a wild air; then, as if tired of her present situation, she walked quickly to the other side of the carriage, where Mr. Read was seen in the act of draining a glass of champagne.

“Now,” cried Webb, “I have no patience with you, Read. Why, you should have pledged us all in a bumper to your lady-love—your wife,—that is to be,” he added, in an under tone. “Well, now, have your fortune

told," continued the noisy rattler; "here is the woman all ready;" and he pointed to the gipsy.

"I detest such vulgar humbug, Webb," retorted Read, half angry.

"Nay, my good fellow, let me tell you——"

"Come," interrupted Ponsonby, "we must all pay this penalty who come to Epsom. So now, Read,—go it, my man."

Read thought it just as well to comply, and fell in with the humour of the party. The woman seized his hand and eyed it a few minutes in silence; then striking her forehead with her hand, "*Helas! mon Dieu!*" she exclaimed. With many gestures and wild ejaculations, she declared that she saw a skeleton slowly moving towards him,—the skeleton of his first wife; "for you have been married," she said, peering into his eyes. He started, but felt his character depended on keeping up the farce. "Yes," she continued, with vehemence, "Your wife looks sad. *Helas! et le garçon!*—the child she holds with her hand has faded away almost before seen: he, also, looks sad and white." After a moment's pause, she continued, in a gayer tone, to say that there was a dark-eyed

girl, very bright, joyous, and young, that his affections were fixed upon; that she was an angel of light,—that her star was in the ascendant; but that her hand should never be his: it was pledged to another.

“Stop,—stop this buffoonery!” cried Read; “I cannot stand it!”

Again she continued,—“It is so; but her refusal of you will cost much: her own lot is—is still veiled in obscurity;” and quickly seizing the half-crown, the gipsy disappeared.

There was silence a few minutes among the young men; they were taken aback at this fortune-telling, so different to what they generally heard on like occasions; but Charles Webb, the indefatigable Charles Webb, again came to the rescue, and restored laughter and merriment to all, excepting Mr. Read, who, not being over wise, was rather startled at the words of the self-constituted prophetess. However, the busy scene around them soon obliterated all recollection of what had passed. Race quickly succeeded race the whole day; and as the last bell rang, Ponsonby settled to leave the course immediately, before the grand crush commenced. In this they were unfortunately disappointed, for on reaching the

summit of the hill, they found themselves in a line of carriages extending at the least a mile. Patience, however, and a good driver, in time allowed them to surmount all obstacles; and they proceeded at a rattling pace, smoking in that listless, idle manner peculiar to the young men of the present day. The snuff-taking days of our grandfathers must have been preferable to the cigar mania of these days, when even high-bred dames occasionally soil their pretty lips with the intoxicating drug.

It was late when Mr. Read returned home, having dined with his jovial friends. How the following day was passed is not necessary to be known. The Friday following saw him again at Epsom, betting, smoking, laughing, talking,—enjoying himself, according to his notions of enjoyment. Lucky for him that he “made hay whilst the sun shone;” for the following week his worthy aunt had full employment for him.

CHAPTER III.

IT was on Mr. Read's return from Epsom, not in the best possible humour at having lost a large sum by betting, that, as he flung himself on the sofa, his eye was attracted by a letter addressed to him, sealed in black. Like all persons of weak minds, he had a particular dislike to anything that was in any way connected with death; and this deep, black-edged envelope and black seal appeared to him rather ominous. He turned it over several times; and on holding it to the light, he was startled on perceiving in the corner the name of Mary, written in small delicate characters. Immediately he recognised the handwriting: it was the last he ever wished to see. He felt strongly tempted to destroy the letter, without even glancing at the contents; but natural curiosity got the better

of his reluctance, and he broke the seal. Strange to say, he trembled as the first words met his gaze—"Dearest husband!"—words which to most men are fraught with joy and love seemed to him worse than the bitterest reproaches, yet he could not say the letter was now so indifferent to him. He opened it again, examined it carefully, and saw at the bottom the signature of Mary Read. Long since determined to forget that there had ever existed such a person—to consider one as dead whom he perversely looked upon as the author of all his troubles, still, when he saw this signature, in a handwriting which once he had really loved (alas! for how short a time), he felt a little softened. He was alone; there was no prying eye to read into his very soul: his *aunt* was out. He rose, sat down again, and seemed disturbed; then, seizing the letter, he exclaimed,—“Well, by Jove, I may as well read it!” It was couched in the following terms:—

“Though for many years you have spurned me from your feet—though I have suffered at your hands every indignity that can be heaped upon mortal woman—though my child has passed the first ten years of his life in

utter ignorance of his father; nevertheless, Augustus, my heart still clings to you. The warm letters I have at times written to you I fain would believe had not been received. My strength fails me. I can write but little; but my child—oh! my child! If one spark of that love which you once bore me can be revived in your heart, see your son—see *our* child! let him dwell with you: let him, at least, be recognised by you as your lawful son. I am now dying—yes, my husband, I am dying. Probably, before you get this letter—before your eyes are raised in angry glances on what I have written, you will no longer be a husband: I shall be dead, cold, and lifeless. But, my child—he, who has borne and shared all my griefs—he still will be living, and alone. My uncle has met with a dangerous accident, and is too ill to see me. He can do nothing for our boy; who is one in every respect worthy of a father's love. Is what I have this day heard really true, that you are on the eve of marriage with another? There wanted but this to put a finishing stroke to all my miseries. Even while I, your lawful wife, am living! Oh! Augustus,—dearest husband!—yes, in spite of all you

have caused me to suffer, most dear—is it possible that he who in early life seemed to my bewitched eyes the beau ideal of perfection—that he is plunged so deep in sin; so irretrievably sunk that he can meditate marriage with another. No, never will I believe this! Oh! when you receive this note, hasten to me, I beseech you—come to me, that I may once more see you; that I may forgive you all and everything. That I still love you, that I pray for you day and night, is but too true. And our child—you will see him—you will love him, Augustus. My strength is nearly gone. After this effort, I shall, I feel, never again do anything. Adieu, then, my beloved husband! Oh! could I save you from all your reproaches hereafter—could I—farewell, farewell—our child ——

“MARY READ.”

The concluding words were scarcely legible. As Augustus read this tender appeal, a slight feeling of remorse stole over him,—a consciousness that he certainly had not acted quite honourably towards his unfortunate wife; but these ideas he denominated as *spooney* notions; and giving a hoarse laugh, he exclaimed

“By Jove! I wish she had died a year ago!” and threw the letter on the table. “And a brat, indeed!” he continued; “likely, is it, I shall hamper myself with a boy of ten years old?—Likely, indeed, at my age! But how in the deuce to get rid of the young monkey I do not know. I must ask Lady Julia; for though she is odious to me, it seems pretty clear that she is more able to manage these affairs than I am. I will go to her at once. Order my cab,” he continued, to the man who answered the bell.

He soon arrived in Manchester Square, and was told, on inquiring for Lady Julia, that her ladyship was ill, and confined to her room.

“Pooh! nonsense! She always admits me. Go and say Mr. Augustus Read wishes to see her.”

Too happy to please the young heir, as the servant called Mr. Read, the footman posted off and returned quickly, saying her ladyship begged he would go to the boudoir and wait for her. Now, waiting was what he particularly disliked, but seating himself, whilst humming a tune, he began turning over the leaves of a writing-case. He was arrested by seeing a letter signed Catherine Selby. When

the first barrier between right and wrong is passed, how easy every after step becomes; *ce n'est que le premier pas qui coute*,—and how tenfold more difficult to return to the right path. Had any of his male friends accused Mr. Read of being dishonourable, such an insult would have been reckoned unpardonable; and yet he deliberately took up the letter, though he saw it was addressed to his aunt; but so great was his impatience to see what it contained, that he began reading. Great was his surprise, and we must add pleasure, to discover that the letter related entirely to himself. It told of the fair writer's love and admiration for him; how bitterly grieved she had been to hear that there were insuperable objections to their marriage, and that all further intercourse was to cease between them. This last feeling was rather implied than expressed, and the whole concluded by declaring that she could never love any one else,—never could know a day's happiness till again allowed to see her charming Augustus.

Overjoyed at this, and with the egregious vanity natural to so weak a mind, he believed every word of it. Scarcely had he finished reading this letter when a noise was heard in

the passage, and Lady Julia entered, looking so different from what she did the last time he had seen her, that it was very evident her illness could not now be feigned, but was real. "My dear aunt, I fear you are very ill," he exclaimed, really shocked at seeing her so reduced. Her bright colour had vanished: whether they had been natural roses, or heightened with a little rouge, we say not; the reader must divine: the few grey hairs that straggled over her face looked most untidy; her dress, generally so magnificent, now consisted of a plain cotton gown: altogether, her nephew stood amazed when he saw her. He led her to a seat, and sitting down by her side, implored her to explain what had affected her so much?—what had happened?

She endeavoured to smile, but the effort was unsuccessful, and she burst into tears. "Oh, Augustus!" she sobbed out; "we are ruined—ruined for ever. I have been ill—too ill to write to you, ever since we last parted; but never mind," she continued, becoming wonderfully calm, considering the excited state she had appeared in a few minutes previously; "Never mind: I shall soon be laid in my grave, and you will be much happier

without me, although the chief object of my life has been your good; for I have long lost every feeling of affection for every human being, yourself excepted. (Not very flattering to my uncle, thought the nephew.) "Now that I am ill, no one cares for me."

"Oh, cheer up," he said; "cheer up, my dear aunt, there's a good soul. I want your advice; I cannot do without it. Here is a letter I have received to-day that will surprise you; and how the devil it is to be answered, I cannot tell. But hark! here is music;" and jumping up to look out of the window, he did not perceive that as Lady Julia took the letter, her hand trembled so much she could scarcely open it. This movement of his restored her to self-possession, and she began reading, but with an evident delight which she could not control. As Mr. Read returned to her side, he was surprised that she had nearly arrived at the conclusion of the letter, and apparently without being much affected. Hardened as he was, he felt this was very revolting in a female; but he had not much time for any reflection, as his aunt exclaimed, "Well, my dear

nephew, and what do you say to this? Is it the woman's handwriting, or not?"

"Yes," he replied; "of that there can be no doubt; and now I am so sorry—I regret—I—I—wish—I hope——"

"What!" interrupted Lady Julia, in her haughtiest manner; "You wish you had been there! I know what you mean to say—you wish you had been there to receive her forgiveness. Ha! ha! her pardon! a great deal that is worth; and to have a beggar's brat fastened on you for the rest of your life. Well, well, you men are wonderful creatures!"

Her nephew had never seen her in such an excited state, and she, seeing (for her quick eye could read every thought of his shallow brain in a moment of time) or fearing that she had perhaps gone too far, added, "My dear, ever since I had this fever, the least thing excites me so much that you need not be surprised at my hurried manner: it is only vulgar minds that are ever surprised. But tell me," she continued, in a quieter tone, "tell me, were you not delighted at receiving this letter? Were you not charmed to find that all obstacle to your marriage with Miss Selby was removed? But there is the boy," she added; "Miss Selby will not like to

begin life with a boy of ten years old calling her mama, I promise you. What must become of him?"

"You know," interrupted her nephew, "Miss Selby dislikes me, Lady Julia, and repels all my overtures with coldness and disdain; you know," he continued, in the same moody tone of voice, "that she has determined to return all my letters unanswered. You know ——"

"I know," retorted her ladyship, "that this letter does not look much like a refusal, or as if you were very distasteful to her, Augustus: read it, read what she says, and then perhaps you will believe me."

Feigning never to have seen the letter before, he read it, exclaiming, "Really, is it possible! Adorable Miss Selby! how charming! But when did you get this? And I do not understand its being dated from Torrington, in Wiltshire, when she is still in waiting."

A slight tremor was perceptible in Lady Julia's upper lip at this naïve observation, as she replied, "Well, Augustus, to think of your looking at the date of a letter from Miss Selby. Why, in my younger days, such

an unloverlike act would never have been forgotten. It is lucky that Miss Selby did not hear your remark. The nephew bit his lip and looked annoyed. "But," continued Lady Julia, "there is the boy, your son."

Augustus started at the tone with which these words were uttered, and turned his head a little away from his aunt; while she continued, "If that woman had never been married to you what a blessing it would have been! Yes," she continued, in an excited manner, "for I declare that all the ruin, all the botheration which has happened, is owing entirely to this unfortunate affair. If you had not been, as you were reported to be, a *vaut-rien*, Miss Selby, overjoyed, would have accepted your first offer. And now, hang it," she exclaimed, walking up and down the room, "there is a boy to provide for! Is there not some workhouse—some refuge for a destitute child? Will you leave it to me to see and inquire about him—will you? He shall rue this hesitation," she muttered to herself, as Augustus hesitated before he gave up his child to her tender mercies. "What do you say?" she continued, turning sharply towards him, and peering into his face, as if

she would have looked into his very soul. His accustomed submission to all her wishes returned. He saw not otherwise how to dispose of the boy; and he replied in a quiet subdued tone, "Yes, I give him up to you; but take care of the poor boy. He at least is innocent of everything that is wrong. Rather a joke," added he, "giving up one I have never seen." Lady Julia's smile of derision and contempt passed unheeded by this weak young man, and she threw herself on the couch, protesting that these agitating scenes were too much for her; that weak and reduced as she was, they made her feel ten thousand times worse, and she could not stand it any longer. "And now I must wish you farewell, dear Augustus. You go, of course, to the duchess's ball to-night?"

"Oh! yes, of course."

"Well, then, give my compliments to her, and say I am too ill to go. Good-bye," and she hurried him off.

CHAPTER IV.

As Lady Julia returned to her own room, strange thoughts were busy in her mind; some of them not the most agreeable. For some time she had been perfectly aware that their income was gradually diminishing, their credit going, their bills unpaid; and if his lordship, her brother, should hear a suspicion of it, she felt sure he would cut the connexion for ever; a thing she particularly wished to avoid. Her aim and object was to keep *the world* in which she moved ignorant of her embarrassments. To appear reduced in the eyes of that world—that ideal master who is the cause of so much misery and so many subterfuges in the higher classes—would have been to her most galling. Lady Julia had all her youth—indeed, till her youth was fairly past—every whim and fancy gratified; no expense was spared to provide her with all the toys and

rich baubles she chose to have. Her temper was so haughty, that every one in the house felt they would rather give up their own wishes to hers, than excite one of her fits of passion. Her intercourse with her nephew, though it had ended satisfactorily, was not so much so as she had wished. Though she had succeeded in carrying her point, of having the child left solely to her tender mercies, yet there had been a hesitation, on the part of her nephew, which she did not like. Unless his every thought, his every wish, was devoted to her, she would not hesitate to plunge him into irretrievable ruin. She loved him better than any one else, it is true, but she despised him for his weakness : that very weakness by which she held such undisputed sway over him. These, and many more bitter thoughts crowded into Lady Julia's mind. It did not seem to occur to her to consider whether it was worth while risking so much peace and comfort to obtain an heiress for her nephew—an heiress that was to retrieve the rapidly diminishing fortune of the Read family. But then the idea of being baffled by a young girl roused her anger, and taking up her pen she rapidly traced some

lines on a sheet of note paper, and despatched them to her most subservient nephew.

As the maid approached Lady Julia to take this note, she could not but remark the excited expression in her ladyship's eyes. Loved by none of her servants, she was feared by all: perhaps less so by this woman than by any other; yet she felt strangely nervous before her. The tone in which Lady Julia inquired why she had kept her so long waiting was not likely to reassure the good woman; who meekly replied, she had not heard the bell.

"There, then, let that note be carried directly;" and she threw it to her across the table; "and stop," she continued, "is Mrs. Howell here?"

"No, my lady, she has not been here to-day."

"Send for her then; let John take a note to her at the Lion Tavern, in Piccadilly—a small out-of-the-way place—and bring her back with him."

"Yes, my lady."

And the good woman left the room, lost in astonishment that her high and grand mistress should condescend to have so much intercourse with an ill-looking, low woman from a *tavern*.

On reaching the housekeeper's room, and

announcing to that important personage her errand, Mrs. Hare took off her spectacles, and looked petrified with surprise. That such a quiet, neat-looking, old-fashioned body should be found in Lady Julia Read's establishment, was very remarkable; and, perhaps, it was by her alone that her ladyship was enabled to go on in the style of living that she did.

"Well, Birch," she replied, "I don't like these secret meetings. I don't like my lady's looks, or her manner. She seems to me to be a little *cracky*—don't you think so?"

"Why, it has struck me for some time past that she is very odd—I cannot make it out; and yesterday she was in such a way, she flustered me to death; all because young Mr. Read had gone to Epsom, as if it was not the most natural like thing for him to do. One thing, Mrs. Hare, I must tell you,—I don't like her looks. I don't think" (and she lowered her voice to a whisper) "she is quite right. Her mind seems terribly disturbed ever since last Tuesday—ever since this Howell came to see her; and at times her lips tremble, and her hands shake: she attributes it all to fever and nervousness; but I tell you what,—she has got some mighty

queer ways. Do you understand what I mean?"

"Not exactly," replied Mrs. Hare, continuing to rub her spectacles with the corner of her black silk apron; "not exactly. You say ——"

"I say," interrupted Birch, "that it appears to me there's nothing daunts her; and that she gets more violent-tempered every day—more difficult to live with."

"It is, indeed, very sad," exclaimed poor Mrs. Hare; "and yet, poor thing, she may have troubles that we do not know of that may sour her temper; so let's hope she will get better."

In these hopes, Birch, who was a kind, good soul, and even grieved for her ladyship that she should have anything to vex her, cordially agreed.

Mrs. Hare gradually resumed her composure; and the spectacles being replaced, said, she did not like these odd ways, and should leave, if Lady Julia had any more strange fancies: that she had put up with them some time, and could not stand them much longer.

Mrs. Birch replied, that she daresay her

ladyship would soon get better; and then, remembering the note she was to write, begged the simple old woman to give her some paper; this happily diverted the thoughts of the honest housekeeper, and by the time the note was written she had so far recovered as to resume her occupation of casting up the house bills.

Scarcely was the note despatched when Birch was again summoned to her ladyship's boudoir, to know if Mrs. Howell had arrived. On hearing she was not, she desired the maid to give her a scarf, as she felt chilled.

As Birch placed it over her shoulders, she was astonished to feel how very cold she was: her hands were like ice, but her face looked flushed and hot. "I fear, my lady, you are not well," said the kind-hearted creature, quite forgetting all she had made her undergo at various times.

"I am very ill," said Lady Julia, a little softened by the gentleness of her maid's manner.

"Would you like a fire, my lady?"

"A fire!—no, no! Why do you bother me about a fire?" replied Lady Julia, turning sharply round.

“I beg your pardon, my lady; but let me place the pillow for you, and get you a book: or shall I ask master to step up and see you?”

“Master! ha! ha!” and her laugh rang wildly through the poor maid’s ears; “he is just the person to be a good nurse;—*so* gentle, *so* unselfish, *so* kind, *so* considerate! Why, bless me! don’t you know he hates a sick room?—and, what is more, I believe he hates me as much as I detest him.”

“Oh, my lady!” exclaimed Birch, deeply shocked; “stop, stop!—you are not quite aware of what you are saying. Shall I see if Mrs. Howell is arrived?”

“Yes, yes!” she replied, in a hurried way; “I had forgotten her. I want her very much indeed.”

Quickly the poor woman withdrew, greatly shocked at what had passed, and not doubting but that Lady Julia was in a high fever, and even delirious. But why so bitter against Mr. Read she knew not; and what was best to be done she could not determine. Alas! the fair sex are but little aware how completely they are at the mercy of their ladies’ maids’ discretion: their character, their temper, their

private actions, are all known by them; they are their companions at times when no other eye is allowed to be near; they observe the effect produced by the direction of letters, by the arrival and departure of visitors; there are few so guarded in what they say before their Abigails, as to leave them in perfect ignorance of their thoughts. How seldom two young, lively sisters, retiring to rest after an evening party, can resist the pleasure of talking over what has passed; perhaps the eldest makes some laughing remark, the youngest follows it up, and before their long tresses are unplaited, or their waving curls arranged for the night, the ladies' maid has picked up a number of little circumstances,—the little nothings that have been said during the evening.

To those attendants who have had the advantage of a good education, this intimacy gives an additional stimulus to be discreet and attentive, and attaches them to their young mistresses; but to weak, unprincipled women, it gives a handle to say many ill-natured things, to spread idle reports: which, strange as it may appear, too often happens; so that what one gossiping maid says to her friend

is repeated by her to her mistress, and thus gets wind. Fortunately for Lady Julia, Birch was not given to tattling; and, excepting to Mrs. Hare, she never breathed a syllable to any one of her ladyship's odd ways. And now that she saw her in this sad state, every other feeling but that of pity was forgotten.

Lady Julia had had an interview with Mary Howell, according to her nephew's wish: the result will be shown as the tale proceeds.

CHAPTER V.

WE must now return to Lady Julia Read, whom we left impatiently waiting the arrival of Howell: who was at length announced. So different did she now appear from the clean, tidy maid who had waited on Mrs. Read with tenderness and care, that any one who then saw her would not now have recognised her. Her cheek was sunk and hollow; she looked with suspicious eyes towards the door, and at the slightest sound her whole frame appeared shaken.

Birch was immediately dismissed; and Lady Julia, making a strong effort to appear composed, said, "Mrs. Howell, I have been hoping to see you, for some days."

In a hollow voice, Howell replied, that she had been ill,—not able to attend on her ladyship.

"And now, I want your aid," interrupted

Lady Julia ; “ but first tell me, how long was Mrs. Read ill ? ”

“ Several months,” replied her informant.

“ Did she often talk of her husband ?—did she dwell on his desertion of her ? ”

“ Never, to me, till the day before she died —— ”

“ And the child ? ” interrupted Lady Julia.

“ She told him he had a father he must love and reverence ; though, till now, so unfortunate as not to know him.”

“ Well, you know, it was by chance that I heard of this woman being married to my nephew ; and my chief purpose in sending for you now is to offer you some handsome reward for nursing her : I ask you again to take charge of the boy. But stop, here are ten pounds, as a beginning, to provide for your immediate necessities. The having a boy of this age, is such a grievous calamity for my nephew—really a dire misfortune to him ! Do you think you could prevent —— But stop a minute, Mrs. Howell, and tell me, did this poor, neglected woman suffer much ?—was she insensible at the time of her death ? ”

“ Towards the last she appeared to be so. Her cough was frightful, poor soul ! She

was always a good friend to me ; and I curse the hour that I was induced to rob her of all those articles which she had hoped would have been sold to support her unhappy child. Wretch that I was, I *took* all her papers—all her letters—I burnt them all !”

“ Did you burn *all*—every single paper ?” exclaimed Lady Julia, with eagerness : “ are you sure you did not leave anything whatever ?—no book, no linen, no anything ? Tell me, is all destroyed ?” And with such excitement had she spoken, that it seemed as if her whole life hung on Howell’s answer.

“ I did, Lady Julia : everything is gone, excepting the child. He is far beyond his years in sense—a darling boy he is.”

“ Darling ! nonsense, woman. Where is he to be found ?”

“ I do not know.”

“ You do not know ? You pretend to say this to me ? Why, I know for a certainty that you are perfectly aware where he is. Woman, trifle not with me ! It is as much as your life is worth,” exclaimed Lady Julia, her violent uncontrolled temper again bursting forth.

“ I will try and find out ; but I repeat, I do

not know now where he is," replied Howell, doggedly.

"Well, all I say is, remember, if you do not let me know by Monday next, I will make you suffer for it."

Poor Howell shook with terror at this threat. The stolen articles rose with appalling vividness before her; and again she wished she had never touched them.

Lady Julia had merely stated that her nephew's character depended upon the very existence both of Mrs. Read and the child being kept secret. Howell herself was under some obligation to her ladyship, and had promised, in a hasty manner, to do all required of her. With avidity Lady Julia seized hold of this promise, and enforced its fulfilment with that peculiar obstinacy so often found in persons subject to temporary derangement. Lady Julia had laid down a crooked line of policy with regard to her unfortunate niece, and was determined, *coute qui coute*, to work it out: moulding every action accordingly. Her great fear was lest any one should suspect her of any mean acts.

"Do you fancy," asked Lady Julia, "that the Doctor suspected who had robbed the late Mrs. Read?"

Howell replied, she could not tell; for that same evening she had absconded, taking with her the little money she could find, and made the best of her way off to the further end of the town: since which night she had heard nothing of any one in the house.

“I must thank you for all your zeal in my behalf,” said Lady Julia, with that graciousness of manner which no one could more readily assume than herself, whenever it suited her purpose to do so. “Rest assured,” she continued, “that you have made a powerful friend for life. And now you will immediately make inquiry for the boy, and bring me word: you shall not lack your reward. But,” she added, in a sterner voice, “mention one word of this on your peril, and you will find it not very easy to escape out of my hands. Beware of trifling with me!—and now you may go.”

With nothing to live upon—away from all her friends—again the tempter assailed this unfortunate woman with the prospect of the reward she should obtain, urging her to stifle all remorse, and to use her best efforts to please her wealthy employer.

“You need not fear my zeal, Lady Julia,” she said. “A short time ago I was rosy and

blooming—aye, and innocent too!” she exclaimed with bitterness; “now, see, I am old, and grey, and wan,—and all from my zeal to you.”

“And love of money,” ejaculated Lady Julia, in an under tone.

“And who loves money better than yourself, Lady Julia? Beware lest you exasperate a spirit fierce as your own.”

“I did not mean any offence, Mrs. Howell. I am so fond of money myself, I generally accuse others of a like failing.”

How much can one word of simple truth effect! Howell, charmed at the candour of these words, forgot her wounded pride; forgot her anger: all, in short, was forgotten, save the hope of the promised reward. Lady Julia even condescended so far as to shake hands with her visitor, and as she did so, said, “Come at any time you like; even if denied by the servant, let me be told instantly; take no denial; I am always at home to *you*.”

With a low curtesy, Howell withdrew; and, though a few minutes previous to this parting address she had been on the point of quitting Lady Julia with bitter imprecations, she left her with the firm assurance of having found a friend for life.

To Lady Julia the interview had been most satisfactory ; for she was convinced that amongst the papers the marriage certificate must have been destroyed ; that the boy alone remained to be disposed of ; that this woman was invaluable ; that her own cleverness exceeded belief ; that her nephew would, after all, be able to marry Miss Selby : in short, all her difficulties seemed to vanish, now she knew for certain that her unfortunate niece was dead. So great was the alteration in her manner and appearance, when Birch came to dress her for her drive round the park, that the good woman was delighted, and even ventured to say, she thought her ladyship looked much better than she had done before luncheon. This remark recalled to Lady Julia how necessary it was that she should be more circumspect before even her own servants ; and she charged Birch to tell no one how unwell she had been : for she said, " I mean to call in Dr. Wilson, and he will prescribe for me ; and if Mr. Read, or Mr. Augustus Read, should hear of my illness they would be miserable. So remember that you alone, Birch, are to know when I am ill ;" and smiling graciously, she left the room.

“ Goodness me ! ” exclaimed the astonished Abigail, “ that I should live to see the day that her ladyship smiled on me ! Well, I am surprised ! And so all her tantrums this morning were temporary delirium ! Well, well, I am glad she is not so bad as I suspected.”

CHAPTER VI.

THE die was now cast ; and Lady Julia's plan of action decided on in her own mind. It would no longer serve her purpose to dwell on the many obstacles which still existed against her nephew's marriage : the principal one was removed by the hand of death ; and had Lady Julia been taught to trace things to their real source, she might here have seen a striking exemplification of the mysterious manner in which even man's wickedness is made to work out the decrees of Providence. But she heeded none of these things. Had any one accused *her* of committing murder, or robbery, she would have repelled the charge with indignation : she would have been furious at such an accusation ; yet, in the eyes of a pure and holy God, one who abets another, who urges another to break one of his commandments, is *guilty*. But such thoughts did not

obtrude themselves, as she drove quickly through the Park, bowing and smiling to all her numerous acquaintances; who, fortunately for her, considered her in no other light than as a gay, worldly woman. All equally intent on pleasure, she excited but little attention. That afternoon, when returning homeward, she determined to inquire if Lady Anne Lyndsay was again returned to town; and on finding her at home, she proceeded to the drawing-room where Lady Anne was sitting with Miss Selby. A slight tremor was perceptible in Lady Julia as she shook Miss Selby's hand: much against the inclination of the young lady, who did not doubt but that all the annoyance she had experienced had originated in her ladyship's brain.

Lady Julia Read was not deficient in tact and quickness: it flashed across her mind, that perhaps she had been a little premature in some of her plans, and had urged matters a little too much at first; she, therefore, scrupulously avoided mentioning everything that could be in any way connected with her nephew. She could talk agreeably and sensibly when it suited her purpose; and as she rose to take her leave, Catherine felt sur-

prised and half annoyed at having thought her so agreeable; though only for one half hour. Lady Julia quickly perceived the impression she had made, and being still willing to keep up a certain degree of awe in Miss Selby, she merely bowed to her, shook Lady Anne cordially by the hand, and left the room.

“Why, dear granny, I am quite surprised that your odious cousin can be so chatty and agreeable. I never thought it possible that I could have been so long in her company without wishing her away: but really I think to-day she was quite pleasant.”

“So do I, my love: but it was to serve some purpose. She wished to make a favourable impression on you, or do away with the bad impression she left on me some time ago. Depend upon it, my dear, Lady Julia Read would never have spent half an hour of her valuable time on such hum-drum mortals as ourselves, were it not to get something out of us, or to see how matters stand. Well, we shall see the motive of this sudden change of manner to us, who, a month ago, were in her humble opinion far too insignificant to be spoken to.”

Catherine's waiting was now over, and she

had returned to her grandmother for a short time, before they all returned together to her father's house: she was looking well, and in good spirits. During the last week she had neither heard nor seen anything of Mr. Augustus Read, so she began to hope he was at last quite aware of her insuperable objections to him. His aunt calling so immediately upon her reappearance, rather vexed her; though the nephew not being mentioned, she considered a favourable circumstance. At any rate, she had now the satisfaction of imparting all her thoughts to Lady Anne by word of mouth; whereas before, she could only communicate by letter. She had been pining for home the last few days: one of her sisters having been unwell, made her the more anxious to rejoin the family circle.

When Lady Julia Read again reached her own magnificent house, and paced down the whole length of the long saloon, filled with the choicest ornaments of the most costly design, every variety of luxurious furniture that the modern artist has been able to invent, she felt she would risk anything rather than have to give up such a home. "And what would my other home

be?" she continued, thinking aloud; "a small, white-washed garret—and that girl," she continued, wandering on, "is fascinating and bewitching in the extreme. She shall marry Augustus—she shall! I declare I will not give up all hope till I see her married to another; and if I can prevent that, she never shall: I would rather see her in her grave than that such charms and such wealth should belong to any one but my nephew and myself."

On inquiring if the said nephew was at home, she learnt he had been there, but finding her out, left word he would call again at six o'clock. As Lady Julia sat down, she saw she must invent some tale to amuse him: she must keep him constantly employed—constantly on the *qui vive*, or he would sink into stupidity; and she accordingly determined to send him to see Miss Selby: or, as she expressed herself in her note to him, that it was only common courtesy in him towards one so highly distinguished by beauty and accomplishments, to pay his devoirs to her. She then retired to her own boudoir, well pleased with the events of the day.

Twice, as the wretched woman Howell descended the staircase in Manchester Square,

—twice was she on the point of turning back and saying, that she washed her hands of the whole affair—that she could not continue in this path of sin, the first step of which had cost her so much. She could not again pass through the horrors of those feelings which she had experienced previously to stealing the articles belonging to her unfortunate mistress. Once she had gone back three steps towards the boudoir, when the money just given her by Lady Julia rattled in her pocket: this must indeed have been the work of the prince of all evil, for her good resolutions passed away in a moment, her hesitation vanished; and muttering between her teeth that if she did not obtain the reward, some one else would, she walked resolutely down stairs, quickening her steps rapidly across the vestibule as she heard Lady Julia approaching. When in the open air she felt a little revived, and leant against an area paling to recover breath: her ghastly paleness, her bloodshot eyes and disordered looks, all seemed to denote insanity; and several people as they passed by her, humanely offered to assist her. She, feeling too well how utterly unworthy she was of their pity, merely shook her head

and made no answer ; till, fearing to attract too much attention, she made a desperate effort, and concentrating all her strength, made off rapidly towards Piccadilly. This was no time for serious reflection : every passer-by, she fancied, must be pointing at her as an abandoned wretch ; the hum of voices, the rolling of carriages, when she reached the crowded scene in Piccadilly, nearly drove her distracted. She rushed on till she found herself at the entrance of the tavern of the lowest description, which we said, in a former chapter, was the abode of this friend of the fashionable Lady Julia Read. Groups of ill-looking men, smoking pipes, were standing round the doorway, swearing and talking in the coarsest language. Howell passed rapidly by, when she encountered a still more disgusting scene. The host and hostess had had a violent altercation, and were railing away at one another most violently ; from words they had come to blows, and seemed both now in an equally towering rage. It was such a scene as we are sometimes told occurs in these dens of every kind of iniquity : these hells upon earth ; but may it never be the lot of any of our

readers to witness any scene so shocking, so fearful.

Howell passed on to her own room, and then throwing herself into a rickety, old chair, covered her face with her hands, and wept: yes, she wept bitterly. She had not been sufficiently long accustomed to the wicked course she was now pursuing, not to feel some sorrow, some compunction; and the tears coursed each other rapidly down her pale cheeks. Her bonnet fell back; and the dark hair, streaked with grey, showed what a change intense mental agony can effect in a short time: a month previously it had rivalled the plumage of the raven. Bitter were her thoughts: she recalled to her recollection the sunny, bright, little cottage, where, in her early youth, she had dwelt; the tender care of her mother; the devotion of her father to herself, and to his other children; the neat, little garden, well stocked; the green fields; the bright meadows; the singing birds; the sweet flowers: all the little innocent pleasures, which she had enjoyed the first twelve years of her life, flashed across her mind. Her thoughts dwelt on the Sabbath-days she had then spent; on the fine, old, grey church, which, standing on a knoll,

seemed as if it offered protection to all the inmates of the surrounding village; the Sunday School, where the Rector's gentle daughters instructed the children of their more indigent neighbours; and, in the evening, the walk with all the family, even down to the youngest child. These thoughts of better days were too much for her; and she sobbed, as if her heart would break. It seemed as if memory had now determined to make one lasting effort to arouse her to better things; and with that pertinacity which it sometimes exerts, dwelt most on the sorrow of that day, when, at an early age, she left her own home to act as nursery-maid to a lady's children. Living in a village near, not a week passed without her seeing her mother; but she missed that kind and watchful eye, which, till then, had always rested on her. For four years she remained with Mrs. Hunter; and then, advised by a silly young girl to try and better herself, she gave warning; to the grief and consternation of all her family, who boded no good from the change. This woman promised to engage her to a Mrs. Ellice, in Hill-street. Thither she went, as under ladies'-

maid ; and, oh ! how great was the difference between this and the quiet, well-conducted establishment of Mrs. Hunter. There were seven young ladies, all "*come out* ;" and every night one went with her mother to some gay party ; she apparently as eager after society as any of her daughters. It was the duty of Howell to sit up till their return from these evenings of dissipation. Night after night was more than she could stand ; beside toiling at her needle all day. She had never been accustomed to late hours ; and after enduring half a year's wretchedness (for she had engaged herself for that time), she again gave warning. Minutely did her retentive memory dwell on each of these particulars ; and on the feeling of false shame that had kept her from returning to her own family. It was by chance she had lodged in the same house as Mrs. Read. She took compassion on the poor girl ; and, little able as she was herself to befriend her, she persuaded her landlady to permit her to continue with her as long as she remained : all Mrs. Read's kindness now rose before her. For the first month after Howell entered Mrs. Ellice's house she had written home regularly ; gra-

dually after that she neglected to do so. She received with gratitude some letters from her mother ; but yet she could not make up her mind to tell her all her misfortunes ; she therefore left no address behind her when she quitted the seven Miss Ellices, and thus her letters could not have been forwarded. She tried to forget that she had a home—she tried in vain to forget she had a mother ! The dissipation and profligacy she had seen openly going on under Mrs. Ellice's roof—though unknown to the lady herself, who left the direction of everything to an old housekeeper, whom she esteemed a perfect treasure ; and the being ridiculed for straight-laced methodistical notions if she went to church, had blunted her feelings. She was not a strong-minded girl : she was doomed to be led ; and unfortunately for her, the woman who was placed immediately above her was most unfit to guide her. She was a good-natured body, and soon obtained great influence over Howell, who did not dare to do anything without her leave ; she positively forbade her going to church, as it was the time she required her services at home. In such a household it was no wonder that poor Howell fell into bad

ways ; yet had her health permitted, it is probable she would have remained there. Mrs. Read was too poor to afford her much relief ; but on hearing that Howell had no friends or relations in London that could assist her, she offered to share a small pittance with her : for two years they struggled on together. Several times Howell was on the point of relating her whole history to Mrs. Read, and explaining her situation to her friends ; asking their forgiveness for having so completely neglected them ; but day after day she deferred doing so : she could not bring her still proud spirit to acknowledge how wrongly she had behaved. Mr. Brown's happy discovery of his niece, when in a destitute condition, enabled Mrs. Read to add benefit to benefit, and to take Howell as her maid. "That meek quiet spirit had pleaded for her," thought the miserable woman, "and what have I done?" At this stage of her remorse she trembled so violently, it was with difficulty she prevented herself falling on the floor : so great was her emotion, though alone, and unseen by no eye but one Supreme. Oh, why did she not yield to these better feelings ? why did she crush these beginnings of better thoughts ?

CHAPTER VII.

THIS is, indeed, a black history! It was while living at Mrs. Ellice's that Howell had first seen Lady Julia Read, who was intimate with the young ladies. After she had lived some time with Mrs. Read, she dressed herself up in her mistress's smartest paraphernalia, and determined to return and pay the servants in her former place a visit. Accordingly she went, and as the young ladies had always been partial to her, she was admitted to them. As she entered the room she heard Lady Julia Read exclaim, "Oh! that report, my dear, is of course false! Most absurd! to think that without my knowledge Augustus should be married—it is too ridiculous! If he was I know what ——," and she lowered her tone; "I would give any one fifty pounds to give her a dose of prussic acid;" and she laughed lightly, making the girls believe she was only joking. At the time she was uttering the

words, Howell entered the room, and after paying her respects to the young ladies, and saying about as much as is usual on such occasions, took her leave. Lady Julia's few careless words had made a deep impression on the girl. Fifty pounds was a large sum to one in a dependent situation,—larger than she had thought possible for her ever to become possessed of by any means. She felt convinced that Mrs. Read must be the person alluded to as so obnoxious to Lady Julia; though how her mistress could have injured her ladyship she could not conceive: what had made Lady Julia angry, and pour forth such bitter words against her, she knew not. "But at any rate," she repeated to herself, as she left Hill-street, "I could never be the means of injuring one so kind to me: ay, in my greatest distress,—no, never!" and she walked on at a hurried pace. But the tempter whispered, "You will not be the guilty person: the crime, whatever it may be, will rest with those who conceived it." She quickened her pace; such thoughts were then new to her: greedily, however, she swallowed the deceitful bait.

On reaching home, the first person she met was Mrs. Read, who was justly very angry

at her having ventured to make use of her wardrobe; upbraided her with her ingratitude, and even went so far as to talk of dismissing her. She said it did grieve her, and the tears stood in her mild eyes, that one she had placed such confidence in should thus abuse it.

Howell appeared really penitent, and immediately her too indulgent mistress let the subject drop. But these few hasty words made a deep impression on Howell; they were the first she had ever heard her gentle mistress utter, and were construed by her into great and excessive harshness. She brooded over them; even these few words had almost the effect (for she felt they were deserved) of alienating her affections from her mistress; the kindness she had invariably experienced vanished from her mind, and Lady Julia's last words flashed again across her recollection. "Could her ladyship have really meant anything?" she asked herself. It was barely possible: but, yet, the dark thought still remained. Alas, poor woman! falsehood and deceit were long since habitual to her, though till this day unknown to her mistress. All the principles she had formerly possessed seemed to have become weaker; they ceased

to have much influence over her. That evening, and the following day, she felt cross and dissatisfied with herself, her mistress—with everything. Nevertheless, as poor Mrs. Read became hourly weaker, and in greater need of her assistance, she still performed the duties of a nurse.

One rainy afternoon she requested permission to go and see her aunt, who had sent to give her notice of her arrival in town. Mrs. Read was confined to her bed; but with her usual consideration, gave the permission required—kindly pleased that her servant had at length an opportunity of seeing some of her relations. Whither she did bend her steps, and who was the pretended relation she went to visit, is already known to our readers.

We have now traced the outline of this woman's history. She, too, had traced it that very evening, in bitterness of spirit, as she sat alone and neglected. So intensely bitter was the recollection of the whole transaction, that she could bear the thoughts of it no longer; and hastily swallowing a soothing, lulling draught, she determined, by any means, to stifle such bitter remorse. After taking this, she dozed for some hours, or rather lay in a

lethargic stupor; then awaking, she resolved to proceed in her wicked course,—since she was now shut out from any intercourse with her former friends. She had her ill-gotten reward safe, and expected a like reward if she could discover the boy. She was again in an excited state, and seizing hold of her bonnet, sallied forth, though it was now growing late. As she threaded street after street, she became bewildered; however, still she pressed on, till she arrived at the house where Mrs. Read had so lately lived. She hesitated some minutes before she had the courage to knock; and she felt so altered that she thought it necessary to call herself by some feigned name. “Let the name of Howell be forgotten,” she said; “let me now be called Mary Stratton.”

As she arrived at this conclusion, with desperate resolution she knocked at the door. The few minutes that elapsed before it was opened, seemed to her ages. She nearly sank on the steps: when, again, the fatal money was felt by her trembling hand. Oh, money! well indeed may you be called the parent of all evil. How many souls have you ruined! ay, and will ruin, till time shall be no more!

The door was opened by a young woman, who stared with fright at seeing one who, to her, appeared insane.

"Is there a child here of the name of Read?" she inquired, in as firm a tone as she could, yet with a quivering lip.

"No, ma'am, there is not. His mother is lately dead."

"Can you tell me where he is to be found?"

"Yes, I can. Dr. Allen took him to his house, and ——"

"Thank you, thank you," she quickly replied, and hurried away.

"She is downright daft I'm sure," muttered the girl, as she quickly bolted the door.

The fifty pounds now seemed within her grasp. All thoughts of sorrow or repentance were banished. She hastened on; but how to obtain access to the boy was the difficulty. She resolved to plead near relationship as an excuse for visiting him, and then see how matters stood.

On inquiry for Master Read, she was told he was with Miss Allen.

"Be so good as to ask Miss Allen if a near relation may be allowed to see him."

The answer brought back was satisfactory, and Howell followed the man-servant into a neat little sitting-room. As she entered, she heard little Arthur's voice, saying, "I pray every day that I may soon go to my mother, and then you will have no further trouble." The entrance of the stranger disturbed his sweet prattle, and his old nurse could not but feel shocked to see him so altered and changed; for she really loved him. He was paler, and a very skeleton, quite grave, and his lips perfectly colourless. He shrunk up close to Miss Allen, not liking the looks of this stranger: for so changed was she that the child did not recognise her in the least.

"I hear you wish to see me," began Miss Allen; "may I ask what is the cause of this late visit?"

With a firm accent Howell replied, that she was a near relation of the late Mrs. Read, and hearing of her death, had come to town to offer to take charge of her orphan boy.

From the first moment of Howell's entrance, Miss Allen had felt an uncontrollable aversion to her; and she calmly replied, "That as her father had constituted himself the child's guardian, she could not, in his absence, give

him up. Besides," she continued, "you know not what you ask me to resign: he is as dear to me as if he were my own child; and till you can prove your relationship to him, I fear I must deny your request."

Though extremely disconcerted at this quiet, composed answer from such a mere girl, Howell thought it better to stifle her resentment and reply quietly, that till this moment she had not been aware that her little relative had met with such kind friends, so that immediately on hearing of the death of his mother, she had hastened to take charge of him: but, at least, she continued, "I hope you will allow me to call again to-morrow, to see him. I come from a distant part of the country, and cannot afford to remain long in this city."

Miss Allen immediately assented to this request, and added, "That she would endeavour to arrange with her father to meet her there."

With this, Howell was obliged to be contented; and wishing Miss Allen good-evening, left the room, grieving to herself that the child would not approach her once. She returned to her miserable abode: the strife between the man and his wife was over, and

had ended by his giving her a blow which had broken her arm. As Howell entered, she was sitting near the fire, muttering threats and imprecations, and vowing she would have her revenge. Her husband appeared doggedly silent, and said nothing.

As Howell lay that night on her bed, she could not sleep. It was many a night since she had addressed a prayer to God on closing her eyes : and now everything appeared to her black, cheerless—horrible ; for before retiring to rest she had arranged her plan of operations for the following day. She had written a letter, and signed it with the name of Mary Read, purporting, that in case of her death she begged and entreated her aunt would take charge of her deserted boy. She then looked at the certificate of the marriage, and the note Lady Julia had written to her ; both of which she determined to keep, as it placed her ladyship completely in her power. After this was done, she lay down on her wretched bed. Frightful dreams succeeded each other. She fancied at one time that she saw with perfect distinctness the pale form of Mrs. Read,—tall, slight, and covered with a shroud, standing at the foot of the bed : her hair stood on

end; her tongue clave to the roof of her mouth. The figure approached her—nearly touched her. She saw the mark of intense suffering still depicted on the pale face: the whole room was in thick darkness, excepting on this livid figure, which beamed with light. The thin hands were clasped together, holding a book,—a small red bible, that night and day had been read by Mrs. Read. Slowly the figure rose from the bed, saying, in a low hollow voice, “I go to bliss—I forgive you—forgive yourself.” At the tones of that voice, so like what they had been the day of her death, a cold perspiration streamed down the wretched woman’s face. *She thought her hour was come.* Slowly the figure faded away,—for a moment only, then reappeared, leading a lovely boy of ten years old—a rosy lovely child, with a tiny cross clasped in his little hands. Gradually a change came over his beauteous face; it became paler—the hands thinner: he looked as the young child had looked when she saw him that very day—so grave, so subdued; none of the life or animation of early youth left. He approached the bed with evident horror; his thin lips trembled, and when he reached the bed, she

perceived that his emotion was great. His mother held one hand, and he placed the other, which held the cross, on his wicked nurse's breast, saying, with that soft breathing tone peculiar to dying children, "Nurse, I forgive you : be happy—be good."

Slowly the light which had rested on these two figures died away : all was again shrouded in impenetrable darkness. The deep silence round her, the apparent *thickness* (if we may be permitted the expression) of that darkness, might have appalled even a stouter heart than that of Howell's. She lay perfectly motionless. The dream seemed to her so fearfully real ; the countenances of both mother and son so true to life, that she could not divest herself of the idea that it was real : that these two beatified spirits had gone before her to give sentence against her, and that their injuries were crying unto Heaven for vengeance.

Happy had it been for her had she continued this train of thought ; but sleep, the sleep of exhaustion, soon again overpowered her. The dream was forgotten ; and, waking early in the morning, the first thing that met her eyes was the fifty pounds given her the preceding day.

The conflict between old and better feelings, and those evil ones of later years, was now at an end. She no longer felt the smallest compunction at what she had done. Money, money, was all in all to her. Thus do thousands and thousands, day after day, throw from them better thoughts, check the first feeling of repentance, blight the promise of their early youth, and sink into the depths of misery and infamy. Much might be said in excuse for this unfortunate woman: the evil examples she had had before her eyes for several months; the early age at which she had had to struggle against temptations—such as those in a higher class can form no conception of: still there was a “*still small voice*” which would have made itself heard, had she only tried to listen to it. Had she, instead of silencing and wounding its gentle spirit by constantly resisting its warnings, well weighed every thought, every wish, every action, with that severe scrutiny which is so essentially necessary to all and each of us.—how different might have been the result.

CHAPTER VIII.

CATHERINE had not been more than ten days with her grandmother in town, before she was summoned home, by the joyful news that her eldest brother had returned there on a short leave. Everything was forgotten from the moment this letter arrived, except the possibility of hurrying away sooner than the next day. But Catherine soon discovered that that was impossible; for though she could easily be ready herself, old people were not so quickly moved as young are. She really felt very much obliged both to her grandfather and Lady Anne, for having determined to take her home the next day. She had not seen her brother for three years; and he was her especial favourite: he was only one year older than herself; and so joyous and cheerful a creature she had never known: wherever he was, all was sunshine; ill-humour and ennui were

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never mentioned or dreamed of in his presence. Then she had so much to tell him: her openness with all her brothers and sisters who had passed childhood, was one of the strongest ties that drew them all so much together.

“Alas!” said she, “there is one subject, about which, indeed, it will be better to speak. Arthur has never seen any of us since”—and an ashy paleness spread over her expressive face—“since we lost our darling. Yes,” she said, “I will tell him every particular. In his letter, he says, he especially looks to me for information on every subject connected with ourselves, and which is, after all, the only one really interesting.”

Memory was so busy with Catherine, that she had scarcely time to think of Mr. Read; though before, she had been in considerable alarm, lest she should see or hear something of him. Now she felt the circumstances were altered; for the next time he dared to present himself before her, he would encounter her brother; and knowing that a large and powerful man, six feet high, was ready to resent any insult that was offered to her, would, she hoped, rather damp his ardour, and keep him

at a respectful distance. The bustle of packing being over, Lady Anne proposed to take Catherine to the Opera.

"It is the last time this year, my love ; and you have only been once. You will like to go again, to hear the Puritani?"

"Oh, yes ! certainly ; if it is not too great a fatigue for you, dear granny."

"Oh, no ! I shall like it ;" and, ordering the carriage to be ready, each had recourse to a book, to pass the remaining half-hour.

Catherine felt her thoughts were constantly wandering homewards : its brightest features flittered before her ; all brightened by the arrival of such a beloved brother. For some time neither uttered a word. Her heart was too full of joyful and sad emotions to speak : she did not even observe that her grandmother was gazing intently on her.

"You seemed lost in thought, dearest child," said the old lady ; "can I solve any question for you ? Come to me, and tell me, if your poor old granny can be of any use to you."

Catherine smiled sadly. "No," said she, in a sweet, low voice, "you cannot : I was thinking"—and she sobbed, as she spoke—"that when Arthur left his home last, there

was a beauteous, fair girl wept over him,"—and now she is, alas! no more, she would have added; but tears choked her utterance.

"Such thoughts as these are most natural, dearest child," replied Lady Anne; "but you must strive against them. You are still singularly blessed with kind friends and relations; and if it is bitter to you who were allowed to attend the last moments of your beloved sister, what must it be to Arthur, who never saw her after disease had made such fatal havoc. He doted upon her; and does equally dote upon you, dearest Catherine; therefore endeavour, my child, to check every thing that savours of repining, and consider that, in all probability, your sister is spared many trials by her early removal. Come here," she continued, "and assist me in writing these notes—they will distract your attention; and then despatch a line to your mother, to say we shall be with them to-morrow. Oh, how delightful that will be! And I think I can give a very flourishing account of my tiresome, little granddaughter." Gently and imperceptibly, Lady Anne changed the conversation to gayer and more amusing subjects; and Catherine, even

before she was aware of it, forgot her distress. That day passed quickly away ; every one was so busy, and, in the midst of all the confusion, Catherine had to go with her grandmother to the bazaar to purchase a few little trifling presents for her brothers and sisters. They wandered round and round the different stalls, dazzled and bewildered by the immense choice of articles for sale that were exposed to view ; and after they had passed round the bazaar twice, they both agreed they must at once purchase something, for it was ludicrously absurd not being able to fix on what they wanted.

“ Well, then, I shall buy some of this German glass for Susan,” said Catherine ; and having once made up her mind, she soon decided on some dark-red bottles and vases for flowers. The ice being once broken, and some purchases being made, the others were quickly selected also ; and well laden with *petits cadeaux*, of one kind and another, they returned to the carriage. Their dinner was quickly despatched, Mr. Lyndsay had gone out, and the two ladies prepared for the Opera. Scarcely had they seated themselves, when the box-keeper was summoned to open the door, and who should make his appearance

but Colonel Selwyn. An exclamation of surprise from both the ladies, and a hearty greeting from Lady Anne ensued. Catherine was also much pleased: if there was one of her London acquaintance for whom she had really taken a fancy, it was Colonel Selwyn; and many were the questions he had to answer, as to where he had been, &c. &c.

“I have only this very day returned to England,” replied Colonel Selwyn, “this very day; and being detained here a short time on a very disagreeable business, I thought I might as well solace myself with the Opera. I had heard that Miss Selby’s waiting was over, and thought it just possible that I might fall in with you; for, of course, had you been in the Queen’s box such an humble individual as myself must have felt honoured by a look. But now may I hope to be honoured with a few words?”

Catherine’s blushing cheek showed that he was not disagreeable to her, and the next five minutes passed in rapid conversation. It is true they talked on the commonest topics, the every-day talk of an opera-box; but Catherine felt pleased. It was soothing, after the odious persecution she had endured from Mr. Read,

to talk rationally and sensibly to such a well-informed man as Colonel Selwyn. But the first notes of the *Puritani* made her silent, and she drew in those lovely sounds with deep delight. Grisi seemed in the zenith of her powers, and the crowded house showed how fully she was appreciated. Catherine little heeded anything around her; her whole soul was wrapped up in the music: her enjoyment was so intense, that she knew not that Lady Anne Lyndsay was giving Colonel Selwyn a detailed account of all Mr. Read's behaviour. His flushed cheek and angry eye evidently showed how much he thought Miss Selby had been injured and ill-used.

"That Lady Julia Read is at the bottom of all this mischief, I have no doubt. She is quite capable, I firmly believe, from what I saw at that memorable Almack's, of doing anything to advance her nephew: or rather to obtain supplies, which have been rather short of late. I hear on all sides, that the Reads are nearly 'hard-up;' and report says, that Miss Selby will be a great heiress: but that scoundrel Read is not worthy to tie Miss Selby's shoe. However," he continued, in a

quieter tone, to Lady Anne, "if I may be permitted to offer one word of advice, it is that Miss Selby does not again admit Read into her presence ; for ladies, I fear, are little aware of what such a fellow is capable, when disappointed of a prize like Miss Selby."

Her own name caught her ear ; and she turned round to inquire what "mischief" they were plotting.

"Ah, listeners never hear any good of themselves, Catherine," replied Lady Anne, smiling ; "but we have not been saying very much against you."

Catherine felt sure of this ; and almost as sure that the conversation must have been about Mr. Read and herself ; but being unwilling to allude to the subject, so conversation on her part ceased, and she became again absorbed in the music. Not so Colonel Selwyn, whose inquisitiveness about this extraordinary affair knew no bounds. He told Lady Anne that the received opinion at his club was that her grand-daughter had accepted Mr. Read, when some horrid story was invented of his being already married, and having a child living ; and then they went on

to say that, even after this, so great was his influence over Miss Selby that she had not determined to cast him off.

Here Lady Anne interrupted him with an exclamation of surprise and disgust.

"Indeed," continued Colonel Selwyn, "it was said that not until the appointment of maid of honour was offered did she make up her mind to have nothing to say to him. From the first moment that I heard this at my club," added Col. Selwyn, "I strenuously denied it. I said that there might be some semblance of truth in it, but that I felt sure every part was so distorted and exaggerated, that the lady herself would be something like the little child in the story of Congo, the negro boy; where, after telling his own story to the good woman of the house, she repeats it before him to her husband, but with such alterations and additions that the hero himself had great difficulty in following the thread of his own narrative."

"Very like indeed, Colonel Selwyn; and though I cannot help laughing," said Lady Anne, "yet I am extremely distressed that this report should have been spread. Should any one mention it before you, you would

confer the greatest favour on me if you would relate all the particulars I have just now mentioned. I give you free license to use my name, feeling very certain that I place such a permission in the hands of one who will only use it at the proper time."

Colonel Selwyn bowed low at this compliment; for he had too long been acquainted with Lady Anne not to know that she never expressed more than she felt.

Our readers may, perhaps, feel surprised at Lady Anne giving such a detailed account of the whole proceeding; but they must remember that Lady Anne had known Colonel Selwyn from a boy, and that he bore the highest of characters; and on account of the report he had heard at the club, she felt it was much better to tell the plain, unvarnished truth.

The first act of the Opera being now over, Catherine took her share in a very animated conversation which took place. Catherine certainly felt a greater liking for Colonel Selwyn than for any one she had met with in town. Yet do not suppose, fair readers, that she was, in the common parlance of the day, desperately in love: "*point du tout*;" she did not feel one

spark of love for him. But she *did* experience great pleasure in listening to all he said; in watching his attentions to Lady Anne Lyndsay, and his quiet little civilities to herself. She had been so disgusted with Mr. Read's forwardness, that the mere contrast was a pleasure; she was flattered that one who was so much older, and reported by all to be a very sensible and well informed person, evidently did not think her anything but very agreeable. He was himself excessively fond of music; and, as he had now learned all about the fair Catherine, he also gave himself up to the full enjoyment of the scene before him. Men are much more susceptible of flattery than women; and, particularly to those of a certain age, a bright smiling girl of sixteen or eighteen has very great attractions. Visions of bliss, which had never before crossed his brain; visions of love, of mutual dependence, of devotion to the one loved object; visions of his mother's joy and love for the fair girl;—visions like these floated before Colonel Selwyn as he sat by the side of Miss Selby, intently watching the genuine pleasure and emotion that sparkled in her bright eyes.

We have already said that Catherine was

not regularly beautiful; but the brilliancy of her complexion, and the varied expression of her countenance, were very often pronounced exceedingly pretty: there was a winning gentleness in her manner, which pleased every one. Strange that this should be the first moment that Colonel Selwyn had ever really felt in love! He gave himself up to the exquisite enjoyment of that feeling, in all its purity—in all its fervour. Long had he sighed to think he should never meet the one fair object who would make him happy; even now he was diffident of his success, and resolved not to be too hasty, but to watch with constant attention every little trait of Miss Selby's character.

His meditations were here interrupted by her suddenly turning round, exclaiming, "Grand-mama, I see Mr. Read; and he sees me. Good heavens! if he comes here, what shall we do?"

"Not admit him," exclaimed Colonel Selwyn, starting up,—“not for one minute admit him,” continued the colonel, his fine face suffused with crimson.

Lady Anne saw how matters stood, at least on the gentleman's side; and she felt sorry they were to leave town the next day. She

had her plans and visions of castles in the air, as well as Colonel Selwyn.

“Well, my dear, turn your head away; do not see him—do not see Mr. Read—pay no attention to him. Sit a little further back, as if you were tired, and let him come, if he dare. But stop; do you see Lady Julia anywhere? For if she is here, I fear I stand but little chance of escaping a visit from him; and if that should occur, Colonel Selwyn, I shall feel obliged to you to remain where you are, and by our great coldness we will soon get rid of him.”

Scarcely had Lady Anne ceased to speak, when the key rattled in the door, and Mr. Augustus Read entered, holding in one hand a beautiful bouquet. Lady Anne’s manner was exceedingly reserved and cold; and Miss Selby tried to be equally so. The contrast between Mr. Read and the gallant colonel struck her, at that moment, as quite astonishing.

“Is Lady Julia here, to-night, Mr. Read?” said Catherine, merely to break the ice. She thought it due to herself to do so.

“No—no—she is not; but hearing it was to be a particularly good night, she concluded you would be here, and therefore sent you

the bouquet to Grosvenor Street, with her love; and, as you were not at home, she desired me to be the bearer of it, with her kindest love, and begged that I would urge you to come to her house to-morrow evening, for a little music."

Miss Selby thanked him for the bouquet, which she would willingly have declined taking; but she accepted it, rather than give offence, or be rude. She left it to her grandmother to refuse the invitation for the following evening; which Lady Anne did, by coldly saying, that Miss Selby was obliged by Lady Julia thinking of her, and regretted being unable to accept the invitation, as she was previously engaged. Miss Selby saw immediately how politic this answer was; for it prevented all chance of his following her: which he had threatened more than once to do. She bowed to him; and again turning towards the stage, did not speak again for some little time. After shifting about, first on one leg, then on the other, as if he were standing on red-hot coals, Mr. Read suddenly turned to Colonel Selwyn, and inquired where he was to be found; as he had taken a fruitless journey once before in search of him, and was determined to demand

some explanation. He spoke angrily, and in such an irritable tone that both Lady Anne and Miss Selby felt alarmed.

"I am to be found at the United Service Club, Mr. Read."

"Very well: then you shall hear from me;" and, without any more notice of Lady Anne, he abruptly quitted the box.

"Good heavens! Colonel Selwyn, what does that horrid man want to do with you?"

"Oh, he is really such a scoundrel," replied Colonel Selwyn, "that I despise him too much to accept, what he means, should be a challenge."

"A challenge!" screamed Miss Selby. "Oh! Colonel Selwyn, if you have the slightest regard for me, do not accept it: do not, on any account—on any plea: lest my name be used as a cloak for murder."

"Never, Miss Selby," said the Colonel, sadly and solemnly. "In my youthful days I might have done so; but no one could be in the army so long as I have been without knowing and seeing the dreadful effects—the incalculable misery, which the custom of duelling brings upon families. And what an unworthy and degrading idea of honour must

that man have who believes that by murdering a fellow-creature in cold blood, he proves himself an honourable person : for in the eyes of all right-minded people, he ought to be regarded as little better than a cut-throat villain. No, Miss Selby ; you need not fear any such result from my interview with Mr. Read. He is violent, but I flatter myself I shall be cool. And now farewell for this evening ; when we shall next meet is uncertain, but remember, that if I can be of the slightest use to you, I am at your service for life." He shook hands with great warmth both with Lady Anne and Miss Selby, and left them.

The Opera had lost all its charms for Catherine : she could think of nothing but that the odious Mr. Read had insulted Colonel Selwyn ; though she comforted herself with the idea that he had given her his word he would not fight. She could not but feel flattered that he had done so : his last words rang in her ears, "I am at your service for life." These, spoken with warmth and feeling, certainly implied much. She could not deny to herself that he was most agreeable, most charming ; but she did not yet feel "in love" with him. "Perhaps we may soon meet again," thought

she, "but now I have been too much annoyed by Mr. Read to be able to think of anything else. And then the going home to-morrow! besides, I am not such a goose as to suppose that every pretty speech made by a man is sincere. But Colonel Selwyn is different from other men; he seems more—I don't know what to call it—more refined, more elegant than the other young men I have seen." While Catherine fell into this reverie, in which certainly Colonel Selwyn did not play an unimportant part, Lady Anne observed her attentively: she could almost read her thoughts on her ingenuous face, and hoped things were *en train*. "But, alas!" said she to herself, "these things always go contrary to one's wishes; so there is no use thinking about them."

Other gentlemen now entered the box, and a lively conversation about nothing took place; till Miss Selby, pleading fatigue, they left before the ballet began. When they returned home, Catherine hinted her fears that Colonel Selwyn might be placed in a disagreeable position by his promise to her.

"No, dearest girl, do not think so," said Lady Anne; "for it may be the means of pre-

venting a duel. Indeed, I believe it is the firm purpose of her Majesty to put a stop to such a disgraceful practice. And now, dearest, good-night; let not the gallant colonel disturb your slumbers, but sleep well, and so be prepared for your long journey to-morrow." She kissed the blushing cheek of her fair grandchild, and bidding her adieu, left her for the night.

Catherine threw herself into a chair, and attempted to think steadily of all that had happened; but she could not. "If I really loved Colonel Selwyn,"—she smiled at the idea, for her love had not yet been sought.—"But I think there is only one person whom I have ever seen that I could really love, and him I *do* really love: that is not Colonel Selwyn."

But where was the colonel all this time? He had returned home instantly, and written a long letter to his mother, describing all he had seen of Miss Selby, and ended by declaring that the next day he meant to apply formally to Mr. Lyndsay for leave to pay his addresses to Miss Selby. Her image filled his soul that night as he lay down to rest, and the first sound he recalled was her exclamation that he should not fight. He felt it was

worth all the stigma that some of his sapient brothers in arms might attempt to fix on him, to have heard that one sentence ; which he fondly interpreted as a natural expression of deep-felt interest.

CHAPTER IX.

THE sun shone brightly next morning; brightly even for town, before Catherine had left her room, or even risen. Her thoughts were now wholly taken up with the delight of returning to her paternal mansion, and the great pleasure of seeing all those she loved best in England. At half-past eleven they set off from Grosvenor Street; and, strange to say, Catherine departed from the gay metropolis without one feeling of regret. As her kind friends accompanied her, she had nothing left to wish for; and everything appeared *couleur de rose*. It is true that she complained a little of fatigue when they stopped to change horses for the last time at Marlborough. The Castle Inn there was very large, it having originally been one of the country seats of the Dukes of Somerset; and at length, becoming the property of the Marquis of Aylesbury, it was turned into a family

hotel. Its reputation in the days of posting was considerable ; the great Bath and Bristol road, indeed to a great part of the West of England, lay through this town, and the Castle was in great request on account of its singularly good accommodation, as a resting-place for families travelling this road.

Many of our old county towns are highly picturesque, and amongst them Marlborough ranks high : its singularly broad street, extending the whole length of the town ; the high-gabled roofs of many of the houses, with stone mullions to the oriel and latticed windows, the rich carving that decorates many a pointed roof, are certainly beauties more frequently met with on the Continent than in Great Britain. The handsome church, with its conical pinnacles, grey and sombre from the lapse of ages ; the deep shade cast by the yew-trees that ornament the college-garden, and stand out in bold relief against the horizon ; and even the market-house, though not certainly in strict accordance with the other old picturesque buildings, enhance the beauty of the scene. The well-wooded hills in the distance, glowing in the setting sun, dimly shadow to the traveller the beauty of

that forest, could he but explore it. As the summer's sun gilded these various objects with his golden rays, our heroine fell into a reverie on the beauties that surrounded her, and pitied those that were insensible to charms such as these. She had frequently admired this same prospect. Her grandfather was one—how rarely is such a mind met with!—who had a store of interesting anecdote and lively adventure to relate about every gentleman's house they saw, and every village through which they passed: he was a charming companion; for though very superior to most men in his attainments, he never showed his superiority at the expense of others; but, on the contrary, rather drew from them the knowledge they possessed.

“Well, now we shall soon get home,” exclaimed Catherine; “‘there’s no place like home,’ after all. I only wish these fourteen miles were over.”

“Are you so very tired of us?” said Lady Anne, smiling; “so very anxious to get rid of us?”

“Ah! you know better than that;” and she pressed a kiss on the old lady’s cheek; “only you know I do want to get home.”

“And if you did not, I would not own you for my grandchild.”

Old Mr. Lyndsay, overcome by fatigue, had fallen asleep, and his companions, fearful of disturbing him, remained perfectly quiet. After another hour's rapid travelling, they arrived at a turn in the road, from which the village of Torrington could be seen; they were on the point of descending a very steep hill, and there at the bottom was situated the sweet village which then burst into view. The church, with its finely tapered spire, the towering poplars, the wide-spreading elms, the river meandering through the village in various directions, glittering in the bright sun, like liquid silver; and in the back ground, the woods of Newstead Abbey: but, what had more charms for Catherine than all this bright scene was, on the right-hand side, a low gable-ended house, enveloped in honey-suckles and roses. Some fine, old limes stood near, and the river washed the banks on the other side.

“There is home!” she exclaimed, in an ecstasy of delight: “there is dear, dear home!” and she could scarcely remain still in the carriage. “And there is some one

standing on the lawn—it must be Arthur. Ah! they see us coming; they wave a handkerchief. Oh! the horrid drag: do put it up quickly, Thomas. Ah! here we are!”

The carriage whirled quickly down the village, every one smiling and rejoicing to see their young lady again; and in one minute, Catherine felt herself clasped in her mother's arms. Oh! the delight of that minute—after the first long absence from home—the delight of feeling a mother's arms clasped round one—a father's blessing hovering near one—the warm greetings of brothers and sisters: such scenes are indeed bliss, and give some faint idea of what that bliss must be where all is “love.” But why did the colour in Catherine's cheek mount to deep crimson, as she observed quickly approaching them, a young man, not particularly tall or good-looking, but with large, fine eyes, of a dark, rich hue, full of the sweetest expression, and shaded by a profusion of dark, brown, curling hair? He hurried up to Catherine; and, before she had scarcely time to exclaim, “Why, Lord Sandford, I did not know you were here!” he had seized her hand, and asked a thousand questions: he was evidently one of those who felt the

greatest delight at her return. Catherine's was a perfect delirium of happiness: everything seemed to conspire to contribute to it. Arthur was near her; Tiny was at her side; and, throwing herself down on the grass, they all sat round her, chattering so fast, that a by-stander might have been puzzled to discover who were the listeners.

"And how is Elizabeth, Sandford?" said Catherine; "and all your party—your mother and dear little Johnny? And how long have you been here?"

"Only a few days," replied Lord Sandford, fixing his deep, full eyes on Catherine; "but I hope to remain some time."

"Oh! that's right; Arthur will be so glad."

Arthur was indeed a splendid young man. He was above six feet high; exquisitely proportioned; with a clear, rich, brown complexion. His large blue eyes, long black eyelashes, and coal-black hair, made him altogether one of the handsomest young men ever seen. Then, his total freedom from affectation, and his open-hearted, polished manners, made him quite adored by all his own family. Susan stood near bending her fair form over him: her long, fair curls rested on his arm;

and, as Catherine gazed on them, she could not help exclaiming, "Oh! you must have your pictures taken in this position — you must, indeed, dearest Arthur and Susan! — Don't they look quite fit for a picture, Sandford?"

"Yes, indeed; I told Susan, the other day, the contrast would make an admirable study: I only beg, if their likenesses be taken, that I may have a copy."

"Certainly, you must."

"Do you suppose," interrupted Arthur, "that I should condescend to give my portrait to any one?" as he shook his fine head.

"Ah, ah! you are grown very saucy; Catherine must bring you down a peg," replied Sandford, laughing; and, turning to Catherine, he said, "Elizabeth is dying to see you. She says you have not written to her for a whole fortnight."

"And how did you like being in waiting?" exclaimed one of the younger ones.

"And what does the Queen say?" asked Tiny; "and does she call you Catherine? and when do you go again ——"

"Stop, stop a minute," interrupted Catherine; "for I cannot answer every one at once."

But come, we are not playing at *tableaux vivants*, Signor Arthur and Signoria Susan; so come, and sit down by me. I want another kiss, Susan,—you darling!” she continued, as she threw her arms round her fair sister’s neck, and kissed her repeatedly.

“I have not been so happy since I left home,” said Arthur: “I never can go to that detestable India again. What a lucky fellow you are, Sandford! You have nothing to do but to amuse yourself, and are not obliged to follow any profession: in short, I rather envy you.”

“Oh! fie! don’t do that; you shall live with me. Why, let me see; I am getting on in years: I shall soon be of age; and then you shall live with me—what say you?”

“Oh! here’s Mr. Selby coming to see how we are all getting on: does he not look better, Catherine?” said Sandford, touching her hand to make her attend.

“Yes; he does, indeed. Here, dearest papa, come here, and sit down on this little bank; and we will all sit round you, like dutiful children.”

Mr. Selby smilingly obeyed her wishes, and sat down.

"How lovely home is looking!" exclaimed Catherine. "The river looks bigger; the garden gayer; everything looks brighter than I ever saw it: it is so nice to come back again."

"And we are charmed to have you, dearest Catherine. I can assure you, that Arthur, Sandford, and Susan have done nothing but talk of you; and remember, I shall not let you go away again, in a hurry. Why, you have been gone nearly three months!"

"We must keep our grand-parents some time, and stay altogether; we are such a merry, happy party: and Elizabeth must join us, and remain here. It is nearly four months since we parted; and I am longing to see her dear face again," said Catherine. "Are you going to town this year, Sandford?" continued she.

"Oh, no!" he answered; "I have no intention of going anywhere—away from you," he added, in such a low tone, that it was lost to all but Catherine, who smiled, and looked radiant with happiness.

"And now, dear children," said Mr. Selby, "I think you had better return to the house,

and prepare for dinner, as we old people do not like waiting."

Mr. Selby gave his arm to Catherine, and they all turned towards the house, which deserves to be described at full length. It was of considerable extent. On one side was a projecting wing with a pointed roof; this was the drawing-room, with two large oriel windows facing the south; and above were bed-rooms. The porch was very pretty, and of a peculiar construction: the lower part was enclosed to within about three feet of the ceiling, and the upper part of the sides was formed of small oak pillars handsomely carved; roses and honeysuckles were trained carefully round the outside. The hall was spacious: in it there were several good hunting pieces, and suits of old armour, besides heads of deer and other animals. The old oak furniture was covered with battledores, *la grace* sticks, bats and balls; in short, everything that could amuse the young people. The house was old and rambling; its long passages and numberless small rooms made it difficult for strangers to find their way about it. But there were no strangers now, and Catherine ran up quickly with Susan

to the top of the house to her own little sanctum.

"Ah! dearest Susan, you have been putting every thing in order for me. What a lovely bouquet: and all my books so neatly arranged in a new bookcase!"

"That is Arthur's present to you, and the bouquet Sandford collected."

"This purse I feel certain, dear Susan, is your handywork. How beautifully it is netted! Many thanks to you, dear girl," continued Catherine. "How delighted I am to find myself among you all again. But where is mama?"

"Go to her, Catherine," said Susan, "while I preside at the tea-table in the school-room. She will be longing to see you, and I dare say can leave grandmama now."

Catherine tripped lightly downstairs, and met her mother in the passage.

"Oh, how good you look, dear mother. Come in here, I am dying to have some conversation with you."

The gentle mother kissed her darling child, and they retired. They opened their hearts to each other without reserve. Our readers must not expect a detailed account of all their

conversation. There was nothing that Catherine concealed from her mother. She told her all that she had suffered from Mr. Read, every word which had passed between her and Colonel Selwyn, and concluded by saying she thought him a very charming person, but Mr. Read detestable.

“But, dearest mother, I have not seen any one so *splendid* as Arthur, and no one so taking as Sandford.” She hid her blushing face on her mother’s bosom as she made this avowal.

The half-hour bell having rung they were obliged to separate, and Catherine ran away to prepare for dinner. The bouquet was placed in a conspicuous position; the children all kissed her as she passed the nursery-door, and she reached the drawing-room the same moment as Lord Sandford did.

“Many thanks for this lovely bouquet, Sandford,” said Catherine; “it is quite perfect.”

He looked the happiest of the happy. When they entered the room, only Mr. and Lady Anne Lyndsay had made their appearance; and Lord Sandford bowed and approached them: they had not met before. His manner was so considerate, so kind, that they were

highly prepossessed in his favour; and the rest of the company having made their appearance, the whole party proceeded to the dining-room.

CHAPTER X.

It is to be hoped, that there are few young people who have not tasted of that supreme enjoyment, the being surrounded by those we love ; and whose eyes have not glistened, as Catherine's now did, with overflowing happiness. It had been such an unexpected pleasure to find Lord Sandford there, that, though she blushed to own it to herself, she doubted whether everything would have appeared so enchanting without him. Mr. Read and all the vexation he had caused her were forgotten, and she silently but fervently praised the Author of all her joy for the many blessings showered down upon her.

But my readers must, I am convinced, feel most impatient to be informed who this Lord Sandford was, and why till this minute he has not been brought forward and introduced to them. Gentle readers, have a little patience

with our tale, and we will tell you all. But are you prepared for rather a long history? if not, you must here wish us "farewell."

Some forty years before the time we are speaking of, great joy was occasioned at Harden Hall by the birth of a daughter—an heiress to the vast possessions and many titles of the Sandford family. For ten years, both Lord and Lady Sandford had silently repined that their union had not been blest with any offspring. Nothing but this was wanted to make them perfectly happy. They had riches, they had youth, they had splendid mansions, fine gardens, ample possessions—nothing was wanting but one child on whom to lavish that caressing care which is the wish of every affectionate heart. Ten years had passed since their marriage, when hopes arose in Lady Sandford's breast; and in due course of time she presented her lord with a little girl. Most fondly was the young child received by its father; most tenderly did he watch over her. All went on very favourably for the first month; but afterwards Lady Sandford did not recover her strength, quite the contrary. As her weakness increased, Lord

Sandford sent to town for further advice. Sadly were all his sanguine hopes blighted on the arrival of one of the most eminent physicians of the day; who, from the moment he saw Lady Sandford, gave little or no hopes of ultimate recovery. She had never been a strong person, and she was now reduced to such deplorable weakness as to be quite unable to move without assistance. Dr. Furguson had been acquainted with Lord and Lady Sandford for many years; he knew their worth and attachment to each other sufficiently to dread disclosing to his lordship how hopeless he thought his wife's recovery; but gently, and in the kindest manner, he the next morning announced what his worst fears were. A slight shudder passed over the frame of the poor disconsolate husband, and hiding his face in his hands, he was silent for a few minutes. He then spoke calmly and in a firm voice to Dr. Furguson of all the hopes the birth of the little girl had given rise to, both to himself and his wife; though that look of deep anguish was now fixed on his brow, which, to the feeling heart of Dr. Furguson, spoke volumes. He then inquired whether the doctor had informed Lady Sand-

ford of her imminent danger ; on his replying in the negative,—

“I am glad of it,” interrupted Lord Sandford ; “I will do it myself.”

“Her ladyship, from the few words she uttered to me, seemed perfectly aware of the state she was in.”

“Thank God !” exclaimed Lord Sandford, “I will go to her. Is there no hope?”

“No hope whatever.”

“Great God, have mercy on me ! for how shall I survive this stroke ? Can you do nothing more, Dr. Furguson ?” and he looked distracted with grief.

“Nothing,” sadly answered the doctor ; “nothing, if those means I have taken do not succeed,” and he shook his head.

Lord Sandford understood but too well what he meant, and with a deep groan he left the apartment. He bent his steps to the sick room of his wife, and softly entering, sat down by the bedside. A stupor, more than sleep, had closed her eyes ; and as he remained seated by her, watching every breath, he fervently prayed to the throne of grace that she might be spared.

In a few minutes she turned over with a

low moan, and opened her eyes. A bright smile played on her face, as she felt her husband's hand within her own, and she tried to speak. Her voice, at all times low and sweet, like the murmuring of water in the distance, was now, from debility, so weak that, excepting to one close to her, it was not audible. Her husband leant over her; and when from her own lips he heard that there was no chance of her living even till the following day, his firmness nearly forsook him. Big tears rolled down his cheeks. She spoke humbly, sweetly of herself, trustingly in the merits of her Saviour, fondly of her husband: as she pronounced this word, the quiver of her lip, and the hectic flush of her cheek, greatly alarmed Lord Sandford. He intreated her not to agitate herself—not to speak any more. The unconscious babe lay fast asleep in an adjoining room.

“Alas! my dearest husband, speak not to me of hope as regards me in this world. I must leave you: but not for ever; you will join me, and we shall be happy. Dearest husband, listen to me! Time, which softens all griefs, will soften yours, and our child will grow up to be a comfort to you. Let

her not grow up ignorant of her mother,"—tears nearly choked her utterance;—"but speak to her of me; tell her all that we have done together. And let her never marry any one who is not deserving of her, who does not really love her for herself and not for her wealth: for wealthy she will be, unless"—and her temples became scarlet,—she murmured in an under tone, "unless he thought it would add to his happiness to marry again." She intreated that no remembrance of herself, that no doubt of what she would think might stand in the way; "for if you are happy, that is all I wish." Her voice became weaker and weaker: she thanked him for all the happiness he had conferred upon her; she offered up an earnest prayer for a blessing upon him and the helpless infant; and then, turning to her husband, anxiously inquired whether the clergyman had arrived: who very soon made his appearance, and administered to her the sacrament. For some hours her strength appeared greater than it had been for several days previously; she had exerted herself to the utmost: but now she sank rapidly—her strength evidently failed her. Her lips were perfectly colourless, her breathing short; and

as Lord Sandford wept over her, he watched the last struggle, the last shiver: then all was still, lifeless, motionless: he fell insensible on the floor. Alone he had attended upon her—alone had he soothed her last moments; her brothers had not arrived, and he felt that other friends would profane the sanctity of her death-bed. Dr. Furguson, who was in the next room, rushed in on hearing him fall, and calling for help, they removed him to another apartment. Many hours elapsed before they could restore any animation to his limbs; and then the sense of misery, of utter loneliness—the reality of the events of the last few hours, which he had trusted to find but a terrible dream—forced themselves upon his conviction. So true indeed it is, that the survivors are most to be pitied; not those who, being relieved from all cares and sorrows, pains and troubles, are transported to happiness and life everlasting. To the young babe, whose birth had caused such rejoicing, the loss was irreparable: but at the present moment she was too young to know her loss; and as her wretched father kissed the cold cheek of his first, his only love, he vowed never again to allow any one to usurp her place in his affections.

Time wore on, and, as Lady Sandford had truly said, it softened all things and soothed his disconsolate heart: he took the greatest interest in the little girl, who was never separated from him. She was a sweet-tempered child, but singularly plain; which was the more remarkable as both her father and mother had been reckoned very handsome. Her aunt lived with them, and to the best of her ability filled her mother's place. She was amiable, kind, and very well informed, but not too much burthened with tact and "common sense:" that most *uncommon* of all qualities.

Thus was the early life of the present Lord Sandford's mother passed; principally at Harden Hall, varied with occasional excursions to the sea side and to London: for her father rightly judged that he ought on no account to give up his acquaintance, or neglect any means of properly introducing his daughter; who would, as his only child, be heir to such an immense estate: his only fear was, that she might fall a prey to some person unworthy of her. He had early instilled into her mind sound religious principles, and her openness and confidence in him were unbounded; still at times he felt very uneasy when he saw how

yielding her temper and disposition were ; and he sighed to think how much she wanted a mother's care at this most important era of her life, when first impressions are so vivid, and very often last for life.

Years passed on, and Lady Elizabeth had reached her twentieth year, when she became acquainted with Mr. Fortescue ; who, to great personal advantages, added refinement, goodness, and elegance. He soon discovered in Lady Elizabeth more good sense and information than are usually to be met with in young ladies of that age ; her plainness was by no means disagreeable, for the expression of countenance was both sweet and amiable. She was equally captivated with him ; and Lord Sandford, having ascertained that he bore a most excellent character, made no objections to his paying his addresses to his daughter ; so in three months from their first acquaintance, Mr. Fortescue bore away his bride from her father's mansion.

The excitement of preparing for the wedding having passed away, her father felt lonely and sad. The last guests had now departed. He missed his daughter's attentions daily and hourly ; but he could not place his loss in

competition with her happiness; and as it was arranged that in a fortnight he should have the delight of seeing both back again, he became more cheerful. The honey-moon passed over, much as all other honey-moons do. Everything was lovely, and everything was bright and fair; and, at the appointed time, they returned to Harden Hall, to the great joy of Lord Sandford. It had been previously arranged that they should spend the greatest part of their time under his roof.

Towards the close of the following year, Lady Elizabeth presented her husband with a fine little boy,—the identical young man who has given rise to this digression from our tale; and for five successive years, the like interesting event occurred.

No two people could be happier than Mr. Fortescue and his wife: they were devoted to each other; and he possessed that firmness of character, the want of which was her only defect.

The children were, indeed, considered wonders (no doubt but they were very much like all other children), particularly by grandpapa,

who thought he never could sufficiently admire everything that belonged to his darling child. Alas! that such happiness should ever be clouded—that hearts so warmly united should ever be separated! But the twelfth year of their marriage had scarcely passed over their heads, when an alarming cough, and other symptoms of decline, were perceptible in Mr. Fortescue. Great was the consternation and grief when this was first discovered; sad the prospects to all parties. Lord Sandford, however, was not satisfied with the advice that the country afforded, and persuaded his daughter to proceed forthwith to town to consult the most eminent physicians; but all was vain: gradually becoming weaker and weaker, Mr. Fortescue sank under this most insidious disease—this scourge of our fair isle. Sadly, indeed, were all Lady Elizabeth's dreams of happiness blighted. Her children, alas! her children. Bitterly did she feel how different their lot would have been had her husband been spared to her.

Lord Sandford devoted himself to alleviate her sufferings; and Mrs. Selby and her excellent husband, on hearing the melancholy intelligence, proceeded immediately to Harden Hall,

to offer every assistance and consolation in their power to the afflicted widow. For many years they had lived in the most affectionate terms; and there was no other person, in her disconsolate state, that it would have afforded Lady Elizabeth so much pleasure to see as her intimate friend, Mrs. Selby: for sorrow such as hers was sacred, and shrunk from the observation of others.

To Mr. Selby was committed the direction of everything relating to the last ceremony; and so Lord Sandford was enabled to devote himself to soothing and comforting his afflicted daughter. The children, too, young as they were, were not wanting in every attention which it was in their power to bestow: even beyond their years. Henry, the eldest, was a noble boy of twelve years old; he had great kindness of heart, and showed much feeling, and every attention to his mother: but of course it was little he could do. His brothers and sisters were also very good, and quiet: but when Lady Elizabeth reflected upon the tremendous responsibility that had devolved upon her, her heart quite sunk within her; and her cou-

rage had well nigh failed, till she recalled to her recollection that passage in Holy Writ, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee."

CHAPTER XI.

THE days of mourning for his father were nearly over, when Henry Fortescue was invited to the Rectory of Torrington by his friend Arthur. He had frequently been there before, but had never been allowed to remain for longer than a single day. His delight was very great, for at thirteen a youth is not too old to feel very keenly the pleasure of being made much of, and of being, perhaps, for the first time his own master. Catherine Selby was exactly of the same age, and these two children were inseparable. Whatever one did the other did likewise, and was never satisfied unless they could take a part in the same employment. Gardening in the middle of the day after lessons, or driving, or riding the donkey, and at tea in the school-room, Henry was her devoted little slave; her slightest wish was anticipated: they amused them-

selves by calling each other man and wife, to the great amusement of all the rest of the party. The week quickly passed away, and when the carriage was seen on Saturday night coming to fetch Henry home, sad were the lamentations and regrets. Catherine said he must never go away, he must come and live with her; and he, nothing loth, promised to ask his mother's leave. After affectionately kissing each other, with the innocent freedom and *naivété* of thirteen, Henry was forced to go away; and with a nosegay of Catherine's choicest flowers for his sisters, he jumped into the carriage and drove off. Catherine's smiles quickly returned: she speedily rejoined her brothers and sisters in the garden as happy as possible; though, to tell the truth, her animated talk was principally about Henry's sayings and doings, and of his promise to come and see them again very soon. That night, as she retired to bed, she turned round to her aged attendant, and said,

"When I say my prayers to-night, I shall think of Henry."

"Very well, miss," replied the old lady, "you may, if you like, there is no harm in that; particularly," she added, to herself, "as

he is sure to be your husband one of these fine days."

During the two months that Henry's holidays lasted he was always at Torrington, and his sister Elizabeth with him : she was a year younger than her two companions, a quiet little girl, with strikingly large eyes of a fine dark-hazel colour, and the very picture of good-humour. These young friends formed a bright and happy trio ; for at this time Henry was very handsome. His dark hazel eyes had even at a very early age that soft melancholy expression, which our readers may perhaps remember as being so particularly admired and remarked by Catherine on her return from town.

When Henry returned to Eton along with his brother James, their absence was a great loss to the little party at Torrington ; for they and their sister Elizabeth were continually there. Their mother was unequal to much exertion, and therefore encouraged by every means in her power her children's partiality for the Selby family. There were few other people in the neighbourhood so well connected, or altogether such desirable acquaintances as the Selby family ; and as they had been very

great friends of her husband, there was every reason that the widow should wish to continue the intimacy.

The shock experienced by Lord Sandford on the death of his son-in-law was so intense, that it was evident to all around him he would not survive it long. He lingered, however, for two years, and then sank quietly into the grave, regretted by all his friends and neighbours: but to Lady Elizabeth Fortescue his death was a very severe bereavement indeed. Her son was at Eton at the time that his grandfather first became alarmingly ill; and a messenger having been despatched for him and his brother, they arrived while his senses were as vigorous as ever. They received from him some excellent advice as to their future conduct, and the interview concluded with a very affecting old man's blessing. Deeply imbued with religious feeling, he impressed on his grandson the strict necessity of being most attentive to his mother, and of acting up to the vows he was on the following autumn to take upon himself; and he inculcated the duty that would devolve upon him of attending to his brothers' and sisters' interests, and as far as lay in his power to supply their father's place. This

conversation made a deep impression on the mind of the youthful Henry. He watched by his grandfather's bed night and day, till the fatal decree had gone forth, and "dust returned to dust." He then showed that he was by no means unwilling or unfit to take his share of the common burthen, and save his mother every trouble and anxiety that lay in his power. From a mere child, as he appeared before, he now exhibited great delicacy of feeling, and evinced much tact and good sense.

We have already said that Harden Hall was a very ancient building, and required very considerable repairs; the sitting rooms particularly required to be painted and furnished. Lady Elizabeth, now Countess Sandford, and her eldest son, the Viscount, consulted with Mr. Selby as to what he thought advisable. He was left, by will, one of the guardians to her children; and in addition to this, by living so close to them, he had been a most intimate friend of all the family for years. He recommended that Lady Sandford with all her family should remove at once into a small house at Torrington, called Rose Hill, for the following winter, and live there quietly, and entirely secluded from all society for six months, while

the necessary repairs and decorations were going on at Harden Hall : the plan seemed so advantageous and practicable, that Lady Sandford settled to take the cottage at once ; and, to say nothing of the love of moving and fondness of change so natural to all children, they were delighted at the thoughts of being so much nearer to the Selbys. Accordingly, it was arranged that in September they should move their goods and chattels to Rose Hill. The moment this was told Sandford (as we must now call Henry), he jumped up and exclaimed, "he must ride over to Torrington and tell Catherine." His mother's consent being easily obtained, he proceeded there briskly, and ran straight up to the school-room, breathless with haste and impatience, to tell her this important piece of news. Catherine was quite as glad as he expected, and taking her by the hand they ran into the garden, and there she explained to him all she knew of their new home. No two little souls could be happier: this July and August they contrived to meet every day ; they were really so fond of each other that it afforded the greatest amusement to all the other members of the family. They were both nearly fifteen, and Catherine was

tall of her age; she was something taller than he was, and this trifling circumstance was the only thing that ever ruffled him while he was in her presence.

With September came the hated time for returning to school, and with many promises of writing to each other, the two young friends separated. Catherine somehow felt that this separation was very different from what she had ever experienced before: when he had kissed her before and had wished her good-by, she felt very sorry to lose him, but now she could not restrain her tears; and as he walked with her to her garden for the last time, it required all the caresses of her brother Arthur to obtain a smile. Her garden appeared less lovely than usual, her governess seemed cross, and everything seemed altered in her young eyes: for the whole of that day, something went amiss. The following morning, however, she got a note from Sandford, saying he was so sorry to leave her, but then "mama had said he might venture to write to her, so you see, you must answer this note:" this was just what they both wished, and it made her quite happy, and she was restored to herself again.

By the end of September Lady Sandford

and her fatherless children were comfortably settled at Rose Hill. After the spacious apartments of Harden Hall, the smaller ones in their new mansion pleased from the novelty; and, Mr. Selby having taken every care that all should be prepared for them, they soon were very comfortably settled. Mrs. Selby's society was of the greatest benefit and pleasure to Lady Sandford; who was a most unaffected and amiable person, but without much strength of purpose: every one liked her—her great kindness and gentleness made it impossible to do otherwise; it was, however, a great misfortune for her children that she had not a little more firmness of character. Elizabeth, her eldest girl, had a great deal more decision, and was frequently of the greatest use to her mother; but her eldest son was the one she idolized: she could not help showing her partiality before her other children, and that in such a glaring way, that poor James, the second son, often found himself snubbed, and denied a request which had the day before been granted to his brother. It was a sad distress to Elizabeth, who poured out all her grievances into the sympathizing ear of Catherine, that her mother

would make such a difference between her children : she knew it would infallibly produce discomfort and divisions among them, and her sole object was when they were at home, to endeavour to make both share every pleasure and every amusement together.

On the twenty-first of December, as Catherine was looking out of the drawing-room window, she heard the stage coach rattling along ; and in five minutes saw Sandford and James perched on the top of it. She waved her handkerchief to them, and exclaiming, "They are come—they are come!" rushed up-stairs, to announce their arrival in the school-room. Miss Brown was very much pleased to hear it ; for she did not at all object to the relief which Lord Sandford and his brother brought to the school-room, by their frequent visits ; and various little castles in the air had she built for her dear Catherine. One hour passed away ; and then a cheerful burst of laughter announced Lord Sandford's arrival. He sprang into the room : he was grown and improved altogether, as was also his brother ; and they vied with each other as to who could express the greatest pleasure in seeing Catherine again. She had also

grown ; and, indeed, now at sixteen, looked very nearly, if not quite, “come out,”—that sort of indescribable look, which young ladies are always supposed to have, when at seventeen or thereabouts. She was perfectly happy. Her young friends sat on each side of her, telling her all they proposed to do during the holidays—the skating and sleighing they hoped to have ; and recounted a long list of anticipated pleasures—“In all which you must join, dear Catherine,” continued Sandford, “or else I shall not take a part in them ; for I never enjoy anything when you are not with me. But here comes Thomas, with the candles ; so I must wish you good-by. Come, come along, James : we must go ;” and he still stood irresolute, holding Catherine’s hands.

“I must not invite you to stay now,” she said ; “but come very early to-morrow ; for I am sure Miss Brown will not object to allow me a holiday ; and I shall be able to sit with you, and you will read me some poetry.”

“Oh ! yes, to be sure. I only wish I could stay now ; but mama will be expecting me home ; so I must go. Good night. Good night, fair lady ;” and he ran away, James following after him.

Day after day, Catherine and Sandford were together. It was evident to both parties that a strong attachment was being formed between them, though only sixteen. They seemed very well suited to each other; and Lady Sandford frequently told Mrs. Selby, that she could not wish her son to do better, and only regretted they were not already of marriageable age; and she added, "it would grieve me sadly, if Sandford, at college, or Catherine, during his absence, should form another attachment."

This observation touched upon the very point that sometimes gave Mrs. Selby a pang; for she suspected that Lord Sandford, though possessed of many excellent virtues, was deficient in decision and firmness of character. She consoled herself by the reflection that he was very young. But this had been the failing of his mother; and she sometimes dreaded whether it would not be that of her future son-in-law: for as such she regarded him.

The twenty-fourth of January was Catherine's birth-day; and Mrs. Selby had promised to give the children a kind of twelfth-night party: the Stanleys, and Sandfords, and a few others were invited. Catherine's sisters had some pretty, bright coloured flowers, which

they entwined among her dark tresses ; and when she descended, she happened to meet, at the foot of the stairs, Lord Sandford, who was lost in admiration, and immediately engaged her for four dances, "and as many more as you can give me, dear Catherine."

She smiled her bright assent, adding, at the same time, "There are some other 'creatures' that I must dance with."

The evening passed off with the greatest hilarity, and every one thought that Catherine had never looked so handsome ; and many were the prophecies that when she should be introduced into the fashionable world, she would make a great sensation. As they parted, Lord Sandford said, "Kate, you will remember what I said : and now, good-night." He warmly pressed her hands, and left the room with his little tribe of brothers and sisters.

Many days did not elapse after this *soirée dansante*, when Catherine complained of feeling very far from well ; she was recommended not to leave her bed. For some days great fears were entertained that the feverish symptoms which she exhibited would prove infectious. All communication with the Sandfords was forbidden ; but on the fifth day, Dr.

Barnes pronounced the attack to be only a violent cold attended with fever. Great had been the sorrow this illness had caused at Rose Hill. The brothers were in despair; which their sister shared with them: however, they contrived to keep each other acquainted with their respective feelings and anxieties, conveyed in some tender *billets-doux*.

A fortnight afterwards, Catherine was permitted to leave her bed-room: she found Lord Sandford in the drawing-room, most anxiously waiting her appearance. He had brought her a lovely nosegay, knowing how fond she was of flowers; and he sat some time with her: he certainly seemed in no respect desirous to depart. The brothers and sisters ran in and out, but the lovers heeded them not; and from that hour, young as they were—only sixteen—they considered themselves bound to each other: although no positive vows or professions were made, still their hearts were firmly united. It grieved Sandford to observe that her progress towards recovery was very slow: the fever left her weakened and reduced. Day after day, he appeared with flowers, or fruit, or some new invented game, or fresh

eggs from Harden Hall. She felt quite happy, yet at the same time vexed that the next week he was to leave her: but she was of a very sanguine temper, and counted the days till his return.

“Farewell, dear Sandford,” she said, the morning of his departure; “farewell,—come back very soon.”

She tried to smile, but the tears stood in her eyes; and he was gone, for three or four months. A smelling-bottle he had given her was always near her. She could not refrain from talking about him. She told her mother of all his deep affection: for her mother could not find it in her heart to damp her bright hopes—to check her youthful ardour, and (as she rightly feared) too sanguine expectations.

Harden Hall was not quite prepared for its owners, who continued to reside at Rose Hill, whence they had opportunities of watching Catherine’s progress, and the sweetness with which she bore the irksome confinement of a sick-room. The more they saw of her, the more she was endeared to all her friends, and Lady Sandford became greatly attached to her. Her present governess, Miss Wilson, had been always partial to Catherine, and

fostered Lady Sandford's liking for her in every way. She saw that, although young, Catherine possessed those very qualities of firmness and decision that Lord Sandford was deficient in; she having lived with them ever since Henry was five years old. She was excessively fond of all the children: she frequently talked to Lady Sandford of the probability of the match taking place, and dwelt with fond affection on all that made it so desirable. Her health had been for some time declining, and she felt so unable to teach Elizabeth, that, with heart-felt regret, she was obliged to request Lady Sandford to look out for a successor to her.

Nothing could exceed her ladyship's kindness and regret; who begged Miss Wilson would only wait another six months and see how she was: but she was firm; and at the end of the month left them all nearly broken-hearted.

Her successor soon appeared: a Miss Rabbit; who possessed a pleasing exterior, was clever, and not very young—a great advantage where there are grown-up sons. There was an indescribable something in her manner, which gave one the idea of insincerity: her

words were smooth and polished ; but her eyes looked ill-tempered. She soon discovered what a favourite Catherine was with all the party, and evidently felt inclined to like her. She openly spoke her mind, and at the same time always paid great deference to what her ladyship said : never contradicted her, or showed that she was desirous to take the lead ; on the contrary, she always seemed to give up her opinion to those around her.

Elizabeth was not much pleased with this conduct. She had been accustomed to Miss Wilson's decided notions of right and wrong, and did not approve this kind of "shilly-shally" manner. But venturing to allude to this, she found her mother quite of a different opinion ; who not only drew a comparison between Miss Wilson and Miss Rabbit in favour of the latter, but reprimanded Elizabeth for daring to enlighten her on this subject : for, of course, a mother must know much better than her daughter. Elizabeth was too much astonished at such an unexpected answer, to make any reply ; she only sighed : and from that day she saw how completely Lady Sandford gave up everything to Miss Rabbit, even against her own wishes. Miss Rabbit was, however, in-

variably kind to Catherine; yet there was something about her that Mrs. Selby did not like, though she knew not what it was: if we may be pardoned the expression, there was an "underhand" kind of dealing about her. Mrs. Selby never was satisfied that what Miss Rabbit told her was true; or rather that it was the whole truth. Catherine, herself perfectly open and unsuspecting, did not discover this, and her mother thought there was no occasion to mention it. A fortnight after the house was furnished, the family returned to Harden Hall; delighted to get home, though very sorry to leave Rose Hill, and particularly the daily society of the Selbys.

CHAPTER XII.

THE following spring was wet and ungenial, as many of them have been of late: cold and comfortless was the day fixed for Catherine to visit Harden Hall for a few weeks. The trees had scarcely begun to put forth their leaves; and the cold, keen air, as it whistled round her, made her almost regret that she had left her own comfortable fireside. But a warm and cordial welcome, and kind greetings from all the assembled party, with anticipations of Sandford's return the following day, made everything bright and cheerful when once within the walls of Harden Hall. Catherine had not been staying there since the alterations and improvements had taken place; Lady Sandford paraded her through all the offices, showing every alteration, and, with sundry inuendoes, hinting that it was most needful that she should understand and

appreciate them all. A vast sum had been spent in building a kitchen and servants' hall: so high and lofty that the sitting-rooms of the lady of the house were quite eclipsed. This did not escape Catherine's quick eye, who laughingly pointed it out to Lady Sandford. The truth is, that they were built on far too grand a scale to accord with the rest of the old mansion, which was of moderate dimensions. The vestibule was very old and handsome, with painted glass windows: this was low, as were also the sitting-rooms.

By the time that Lady Sandford had paraded her *protégée* over the house, it was high time to think of preparing for dinner; and Elizabeth took Catherine away to her room, too glad and happy to have her again with them. Scarcely had they shut the door, when she threw her arms round Catherine's neck, calling her by many an endearing name, and saying, with a knowing look, how rejoiced Sandford would be to find her there. She then gave her a dozen kisses, and flew away. That evening, and every succeeding one, as soon as Elizabeth had performed her toilette for the night, she hastened into her friend's room, and lingered till the clock struck twelve be-

fore she could wish her good-night. They discussed everything and everybody, and were as happy as two such gay young hearts should be. The following day was bright and sunny: in honour, no doubt, of Sandford's return, who was to be surprised by finding Catherine domesticated there. On the top of the steps he was greeted by his brothers and sister alone, and conducted into the drawing-room.

"Well, mother," he began, "so you have lost Miss Wilson; and I am very sorry for it. How do you like Miss—what's-her-name?"

"Rabbit. Oh, very much! She seems very pleasing," replied Lady Sandford.

Elizabeth was silent. "And how are *all* the Selbys?"

"Quite well," answered Catherine, entering the room at this moment.

"What! Catherine, are you here?—that is delightful: how very kind of you!" and his large full eyes were fixed on her, as he shook her affectionately by the hand. To judge by her manner and looks, there had been no great sacrifice on her part.

The following three weeks passed swiftly away. One evening—it was late—Sandford

proposed to Catherine, to walk round the park. Elizabeth had gone in ; yet Catherine still lingered on the terrace. " If you are not tired, do, dear Catherine, go with me." She assured him she was not the least ; and, taking hold of his arm, they sauntered out together, followed by one of her little brothers. Not a syllable was breathed between them that could positively be called "*love-making*;" but much—very much—felt and understood, though not expressed. It was a lively evening, made on purpose for walking : not too hot ; so opening a little wicket, that led into the park, they were soon far from the house, amongst the woods. The deer were roused from their turfy beds by the rustling of their feet ; and as one bounded by, Catherine exclaimed, how much she should like to have his fine antlers.

" The head shall be yours, Catherine," replied Sandford, " when the season for shooting them comes ; but to-morrow, we will have another stroll, and then you can choose which pair you will have : now it is getting late, and too dark ; so, folding her shawl more tightly round her throat, he asked their little companion, if he was tired. In truth, the child's presence had been nearly forgotten by both.

“Oh! no, not a bit; but hark! there is the clock striking nine; and I ought to be in bed.”

“Well, then, we will return homewards directly. Here, little man, give me your hand;” and to Catherine he added, smiling sweetly, “do lean more on my arm—I like to feel that I am a little support to you.”

So pleasantly, so blissfully had the last hour passed, that Catherine could hardly credit that time had flown so rapidly.

“I am afraid, Catherine,” said her companion, “you cannot, by this dim light, see all the new plantations, or the alterations that have been made. I hope you will approve of them, or I shall not.”

“You can have no doubt but that I shall approve of them, Sandford: how lovely the place looks! See where the moon is rising behind the hill: how grand and stately the old beech trees appear under its gentle influence! You have, indeed, Sandford, taken me a charming walk; and here we are on the terrace again. I must run and take off my bonnet, or else we shall keep Lizzy and her tea waiting.”

“Oh, do stop for one moment, Catherine; tell me, did you ever, in your life, see any-

thing so pretty, so peaceful as the park, just at this present moment?"

"No, never;" replied Catherine, with heightened colour. "Every time I see it, I admire it more and more."

"May it be ever thus," slowly replied Lord Sandford; his large, beaming eyes fixed on Catherine's blushing face. "May it be ever thus!" and he gazed on her with deep affection.

She felt the influence of those speaking eyes, and, smiling amidst her blushes, seized hold of the little boy's hand, and drew him away with her.

As Lord Sandford gazed on her retreating form, he thought that till that night he had never felt the full witchery of all her charms. There was a fascination in her manner, a trustfulness (if we may coin a word) towards himself which was most inexpressibly winning. "Oh! if I were but of age," he exclaimed aloud, "many weeks should not pass before I called her my own."

He was startled by footsteps near, and turning round, perceived his little sister approaching him. "Why, my little Kate, out so late alone?" he said.

“Oh, brother; I thought I was lost. I went to see the puppies, and one ran in among the bushes; I have only just found him; and then, brother, I nearly lost myself, and was getting frightened. But look here, he is safe, so I don’t mind my fright;” saying this, she opened her pinafore, and showed him an ugly little terrier puppy, looking most disconsolate and unhappy.

“Well done, Kate, my darling,” said Sandford, laughing; “never mind, we must name the puppy Runaway.”

“Oh! that’s a famous name,” replied the delighted child, and scampered off with her treasure.

“The tea is quite ready, Sandford, and all the party are waiting for you;” said a soft, merry voice, which he recognised as Elizabeth’s.

At this moment, sounds of sweet melody broke upon his ear; he listened: it was Catherine singing the wild Irish air, “Kate Kearney.” Music was not one of his predominant passions, but these few simple words, sung with much feeling and expression, and in the frame of mind he was in towards Catherine, made them appear to his ravished ears en-

chanting. The song ceased, and talking and laughter was heard within; still Sandford lingered; he was happy enough at that moment to wish to remain exactly as he was, till another summons from Elizabeth attracted him to the drawing-room.

"Why, my dear Sandford, I began to think you had gone to sleep," said his mother, laughing; "here, sit down; we shall not get rid of the tea apparatus before it is time for our evening prayers."

Catherine was amusing herself with turning over her music book, occasionally giving a few notes of a song, and James Sandford was close to her. He was passionately fond of music, and expatiating eagerly on the merits of some songs he had heard the week before; when, stopping suddenly in the midst of his musical harangue, he said, "Why, how is this, Elizabeth? I have no sugar in my tea."

"Yes, I assure you there are three lumps."

"Three lumps! I dare say, indeed; just as if you would get me to believe that. Now is there, Catherine?"

"Oh, I am sure I cannot possibly tell what quantity of sugar there is in your tea," replied Catherine, laughing.

"How tiresome you are, James. You are the greatest bore ——"

"Thank you, mother."

"The greatest plague ——"

"Thank you, mother!"

"Oh, pray do not, James; pray do not say another word," whispered Catherine to the poor abashed boy. He was silent; not so his mother, who, not being over fond of her second son, was always glad to have some occasion of snubbing, and of finding fault with him. "So different from Sandford," said her ladyship. "Ah, James, you will have to pay for your own sugar some day, and then you will find a difference. Three lumps of sugar, indeed, in one cup of tea! who ever heard of such a thing?" How long her *ladyship* would have gone on in this *unladylike* way, it is impossible to say; but she was obliged to desist from scarcity of breath. Her poor son James, the innocent cause of this fuss, never lost his temper; for which forbearance Catherine gave him great credit. She knew that at home Lady Sandford was not *quite* so agreeable as she was in society. Still, when her manner was always so gentle, though, perhaps, a little wee bit *fussy*, she was thun-

derstruck at this sudden outbreak, and all about nothing.

“Well, Catherine,” said James, “is that the way *your mother* talks to Arthur?”

“Oh, stop! oh, pray stop!” exclaimed Sandford. “Dearest mother,” he continued (whilst he looked with beseeching eyes at his brother, who was too good-tempered not to follow the wish expressed by that silent look), “we have had such a delightful walk. I really regretted that you were dissuaded from accompanying us, and Miss Rabbit also. It was quite delicious; I was sorry to be obliged to come within doors.”

“I do not doubt it, my son,” coldly replied his mother.

Catherine felt very uncomfortable at this short remark; but not so Sandford, who seemed fully prepared to brave the storm, be it what it might, and ended by proposing a game of *ecartè* with her cross ladyship: who by her ill-humour had spoilt the pleasure of the whole party. The smiles of good-humour instantly returned, and she was all graciousness again; while Catherine and Elizabeth, at the request of the two brothers, sang some little duets, and thus diverted them till the white-headed

old butler came in to announce that it was ten o'clock.

The music ceased, the books and work were thrown aside, and they all adjourned into the next room. In a clear deep voice, at whose tones Catherine felt a thrill through every vein, Sandford read the prayers. He implored mercy and protection on all. His voice trembled a little, as he prayed that grace might be given to all to subdue every evil temper: that all harsh and angry words might be forgotten and forgiven. As Lady Sandford rose from her knees she felt bitterly how sad an example she had that night set all her children. After a little more conversation, good-night was said, and the happy party dispersed for the night.

"What a glorious night it is!" exclaimed Catherine, as they passed the staircase-window. "What a shame it is to shut out those brilliant stars!"

"They do, indeed, look beautiful," said Lady Sandford; "but it is high time for you to retire to bed. I don't know what Mr. Selby would say, if you were to lose the bloom of your rosy cheeks while you are here. Good-night, dear," and, giving her an affectionate kiss, she left her with Elizabeth.

It was late before the two young friends separated; for Catherine told Elizabeth every particular of their evening stroll, and much did it rejoice her warm heart to see that everything was going on so favourably.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE next morning, Catherine announced her intention of writing several letters, and amongst them, one to her mother. Lord Sandford insisted upon his not only being allowed to see them, but to add something to each. Catherine coloured very much, and replied, "Well, you shall see this note when I have finished it."

"No, that will not satisfy me. I will see the one you wrote to Mrs. Selby."

"Well, so you shall. But stop a minute, Sandford; I will dictate, and you shall write. Now begin:—My dear mama, I take this opportunity of writing by the post——"

"What arrant stuff, Catherine!"

"To tell you that I am quite convalescent, ——"

"Wait a moment; really such a long word

is rather difficult to spell!—con-va-les-cent. Come, do go on.”

“And that I am quite happy, because every one likes me.”

“Oh, oh! I am not quite so sure of that. Say excepting ——”

“Excepting the hope of the house, who is so disagreeable that I must give up writing.”

“Well, this is a capital letter, no doubt, Signora Catarina; a capital letter. Pray how is it to be wound up? for we must do that in the most approved style.”

“Oh! affectionate daughter, loving child, anything.”

“Well, then, I have put,—Remain your *anything* for ever, Catherine Selby.”

This letter-writing produced peals of laughter among the young people; particularly after Sandford had written one in a similar strain, only entreating that Catherine might be fetched home, as he was so wearied and tired of her.

“What a parcel of stuff you are scribbling!” said James, in a solemn tone. “Don’t you think Sandford very silly, Catherine? Now, do say you think him very silly,” and

he lowered his voice a little as he urged her to say this.

"Now, do say *you* think him very silly," replied Catherine, repeating his words.

"How tiresome you are, Catherine; I cannot endure such folly, and shall take myself off," said James.

"Well then, adieu,—*au revoir*. Pray go out and find wisdom, and come and distribute it amongst us poor deluded mortals."

He made a low bow and left the room, humming one of his tormentor's songs. After a storm comes a calm, is the old saying; and a few minutes' silence succeeded to the incessant chatter which had been kept up ever since breakfast time. Catherine wrote a few notes very rapidly.

"I never knew any one write so quickly as you do, Catherine," said Elizabeth.

"Oh, do you think so. Why, the thoughts come so quickly into my head, that I cannot write them down half fast enough; however, I will allow that I do scribble at a great pace."

"You do, certainly," interrupted Sandford, "write at a railroad pace; why, I have scarcely covered the first sheet of my paper, and you

have written the whole sheet : but then mine is so neat, so ——”

“ So cramped, so ugly,” interrupted Catherine ; “ whereas mine is so pretty, so ladylike, so ——”

“ Scratchy, so scrawly, so ——”

“ *Comme il faut !*” gaily replied Catherine.

“ *Comme il ne faut pas !*” shouted Sandford ; and his companions laughed at his attempt at French. “ Well, now the writing is over, do come out : and you, Elizabeth, will you not come out too ?”

“ So I will, directly ; but you had better not wait for me. Catherine, I will seal all your despatches ; so run along and get your bonnet.”

“ And you will come to me on the terrace, Sir Signor ?” and she tripped up stairs.

A broad grass terrace extended before the house, opening into what had once been the bowling-green. High terraces surrounded it on three sides, and the fourth side joined the house. Stone steps led from the green to the terrace, bordered on either side with prim cut yew hedges, the last remaining proofs of the antiquity of the garden. A low brick wall extended along the terrace, running

north and east, along which were seen, in luxuriance, choice creepers and roses. Parterres of the gayest early spring flowers charmed the eye. Catherine had certainly taken summer with her to Harden Hall; previously the weather had been wintry and cold, now it was cheerful and sunny, and everything in the garden seemed bursting forth. The sun shone brightly as Catherine tripped into the garden, where she found Sandford waiting for her; they tapped at the window to tell Elizabeth she would find them in the yew walk; he gave his fair companion his arm, and they left the terrace.

Lord Sandford had not forgotten the promise he had made Catherine the preceding evening, to give her the antlers of one of his finest stags. He had directed that the finest deer should be driven up before the windows, that she might see which she would like to have. It was quite a surprise to her, when she saw all the pretty creatures running towards them. "How pretty they look!—how very pretty!" she exclaimed.

"Do not speak, fair one," answered Sandford, with a smile; "or they will not come nearer to us. We had better sit down on

this bench ; and then we can watch them, without their seeing us."

"Oh ! they are far too lovely to kill, Sandford : I like to see them there in the park ; they are so graceful. Do look at that one—what a love ! How he holds up his head, and looks so proudly on all the others."

"I see that is the one you admire the most, Catherine ; and he shall be yours. Here, Allen," he continued, to the keeper, who was now approaching towards them : "see that this old buck is killed next season, and the horns carefully preserved. And now," he added, rising up, "since that important point is decided, we will take a walk."

"But where is Elizabeth ?" said Catherine ; for it suddenly occurred to her that she was to be of the party.

"Oh ! she will follow us. Come, we will start this way," pointing to a little plantation of larch, "that you may see what I propose doing in the autumn ;" and from thence they walked to the yew wood.

"I don't quite like the yew-walk, Sandford, it looks so sombre, even in this bright sunshine ; so what must it look in winter ?"

"Still more gloomy ; but I like it very

much. I like the dark hue of these old trees : they appear to me to speak of —— but I must not go off into one of my fanciful fits ; or you will be tired to death of your companion, long before we get home.”

“That is very likely, Sandford ; and I am almost inclined to be offended at your deeming it possible. But tell me, are those hills in the distance, so richly wooded—are they yours ? See, the sun tinges them now with a brighter colour : a short time ago, they appeared blue.”

“No ; they belong to a Mr. Hamilton, a man about fifty, who has just married a girl of eighteen. He treats her shamefully ; is harsh and unkind in every way, thwarting her most trifling wish : in short, he is a weak and selfish man. Your father is slightly acquainted with him, I believe : but it is very likely you may not have heard of him ; for I cannot conceive two more uncongenial spirits than those of Mr. Selby and Mr. Hamilton.” -

“Poor little woman ! how very much I pity her—has she been married long ?”

“About three years. Her father was a widower, with a large family of daughters : this one was the youngest—the darling. One

day, their father declared his intention of again entering into a matrimonial engagement. His children were horrified with surprise and disgust, at the idea of seeing their beloved mother's place filled up by a girl of eighteen; and Susan, meeting with Mr. Hamilton the following day, captivated by his attentions and hearty manner, in an evil hour, for herself, listened to his addresses, and consented to become his wife. Poor girl!—most bitterly must she rue the day she first saw him. She married to escape the uncertain evils of a young stepmother, and fell into the certain misery and wretchedness of marrying a man she knew nothing of.”

“Poor thing, how sad!—how very sad! It only proves that there are many cases in which it is far better to remain single than to marry.”

“Yes, there I quite agree with you. But this is not the only instance, I fear, of young girls falling headlong into misery from the mere wish of being married — as if every situation in life had not its *desagrémens*. And yet, Sandford, I can hardly help laughing,” continued Catherine, her clear, sweet laugh echoing through the wood; “that we

should be prosing away about marriage in this sort of cool manner. So," she added, with a malicious look, "if I wish to marry an old man to-morrow, you will not give your consent?"

He smiled, and replied firmly, "You know, you artful creature, that I would never give my consent to your marrying any one, either old or young, *but myself*. Tell me, Catherine, pray tell me you will not do so. To-morrow you leave us: soon afterwards I must return to college, and when I am there I cannot write to you; for as yet, it will not be thought quite correct. Do not look so sad, dearest Catherine: it would not be thought strictly correct. Only say that you will be mine. Oh, these weary years,—why do they not pass away more rapidly? It is a cruel will which so positively prohibits my marrying till I am of age. Only, dear Catherine, tell me you will be the same towards me then as you are now. Of myself, I can only say, I shall be faithful unto you till death."

"And I can only repeat your words, dear Sandford," murmured the blushing Catherine.

"Thank you a thousand times, dearest," he began, but checked himself, saying, "We

must go on in the same friendly manner—almost childish manner as before, Catherine; and your parents and my mother must alone know what has this day passed between us.”

“Oh, yes, Elizabeth ought to know,” exclaimed Catherine; “for I am sure,” she blushing added, “that she already loves me as a sister.”

“That she does, Catherine; so tell her, certainly: and now we ought to return to the house. I feel so bewildered with happiness! I have sometimes feared, Catherine, that you would not think me good enough for yourself. Poor James!” he continued, “I am sorry for his disappointment.”

Elizabeth now appearing in the distance, they rose from the grass bank where they had been sitting, and went towards her.

“If,” said Catherine, “you go so soon to college, I shall not see you for ages; for I go at Christmas to my grandpapa’s, and then return in February, and go up again in May.”

“How very provoking! is this really quite settled? However, we must make the best of it. I think, perhaps, you will not go at Christmas; or a hundred and fifty things may happen between this and then.”

Upon Elizabeth joining them, Catherine said, "Why, I am telling Sandford how provoking it is that, most likely, I am to go this winter to grandpapa's instead of remaining at home; and if you are going to the sea in the autumn, we shall be like buckets in a well—never here together."

"Oh, then you must come and stay with us as often as you possibly can. But really I do not understand why you should leave Harden Hall to-morrow: let us return and consult mama about it. If we send a messenger to Torrington they will not be the least surprised; they know we will take every care of you."

"Never mind sending any one," replied Sandford; "I will ride myself; and Catherine will write a note: we know how quickly she can do that: this is the best plan; and now," he added, turning his eyes on Catherine, "I will allow you to write without my seeing what you *do* write."

Laughing and talking, the happy trio soon reached the house. Miss Rabbit was the first person Elizabeth met with, and she told her immediately of their proposal of detaining Catherine. She replied,—

“I shall be extremely glad if Miss Selby can stay; but I cannot say a word about it. You must ask her ladyship, who always knows best.”

“Well, then, Elizabeth, run up and ask mama,” said Sandford, “there’s a good girl; and say I wish it very much: that Catherine and you both wish it very much. Say—”

“Oh, I am sure,” interrupted Miss Rabbit, “if your lordship approves of this plan, her ladyship can have no objection. Shall I go and ask?”

“Oh, no, pray do not trouble yourself, Miss Rabbit: Elizabeth is only too happy to go. I should have been sorry had *you* taken such great trouble for me.”

Miss Rabbit bit her lip in silent vexation. She saw she had gone a little too far; but, being a sensible woman, she felt that any attempt to apologise would only make her rudeness more apparent: so merely saying, in her softest tone, that no one could desire Miss Selby’s company more than herself, she left the room.

“What a canting old humbug that woman is!” exclaimed Sandford, as she shut the door. “Why, it is enough to enrage a saint, the

way that she palavers and flatters, and thinks one fool enough to swallow it all! The only good thing about her is, that she has visited Cambridge, and has been able to tell me a great deal about it."

"Why did you not go to Oxford? Papa, I know, wished you to do so."

"My mother preferred Cambridge; and I really think it can make but very little difference which university one belongs to. Well, Elizabeth," he added, as his sister entered the room, "what does mother say?"

"Oh, she is delighted, and is writing to Mrs. Selby now, to ask permission for Catherine to remain here. I told her you would ride over, as she did not know how to get the note to Torrington."

"The next thing to do, then, is to order my pony."

"And I will write a line to mama, while you get ready, Sandford."

Neither Mr. nor Mrs. Selby felt at all averse to their daughter remaining where she was so happy; and Lord Sandford soon returned, with the welcome news that she might continue at Harden Hall another week.

"Hurrah! hurrah!" he exclaimed; "I am so delighted!—I am crazy! So, poor Kitty,

you are to remain here another week!—hurrah!” and he danced about the room like a madcap.

“So am I equally pleased,” exclaimed Elizabeth.

“And so am I,” added Catherine.

This week of happiness passed even more rapidly than the last, and then Catherine returned home. Shortly afterwards the party at Harden Hall dispersed, so that some time elapsed before Catherine again met them. A brisk correspondence was kept up between her and Elizabeth during their long absence; and before going to town, the two friends met for a short time. Her grandfather, passionately attached to Catherine, would not hear of her visit being deferred; though, much as she loved him, truth compels us to confess that at this particular time she would rather have remained near Harden Hall.

“*Tempus fugit*,” and it was February before she returned to the Rectory. Sandford had then returned to Cambridge, so that she had not seen him for many months; when, to her great delight, he appeared on the lawn to welcome her home.

This long digression was necessary to make

our history intelligible to the reader: for a considerable change had taken place in both the lovers since they had parted a twelvemonth before. Lord Sandford had now arrived at man's estate; he had put aside his boyish ideas about Catherine: or rather had allowed them to ripen into deeper feelings; to him she appeared the first of womankind. The little glimpse that Catherine had seen of London life, and the wretched specimen of love-making she had met with in Mr. Read, had quite disgusted her. With tenfold more relish she turned to him who, almost unknown to herself, she considered quite perfect; and even allowed him to exercise an influence over her. Though only eighteen, Catherine was possessed of strong, good sense, and had determined, till she clearly ascertained that she was as highly esteemed by Lord Sandford as formerly, to steel her heart against those delightful dreams of love, which she felt the sight of him inspired. Alas! such good resolutions are made but to be broken. The first sound of his voice—the first few accents she heard him utter that evening of her arrival, made her forget that she had reasoned with herself on the necessity of not allowing her thoughts to

dwell on him till he was of age. His manner was so gentleman-like, so full of attention, and yet so quiet and so different from what she had lately seen in Mr. Read, that she felt angry with herself at having even for one minute compared them together. Not a cloud disturbed her happiness that evening; not a word was breathed that could in any way hurt or wound the feelings of any one present. One thing, however, soon occurred which rather annoyed the whole party.

As they were strolling through the garden, voices were heard approaching, and three of the Miss Stanleys made their appearance. It was impossible to escape; it was impossible to avoid asking them to remain the evening; it was impossible, when they objected to the lateness of the hour, for the two young men to avoid offering their services to escort them home: but, luckily, their civility was not put to the proof; for five minutes after the young ladies had consented to remain, Mr. Stanley arrived, and insisted on taking them all home: he came but to shake Catherine by the hand, was rejoiced to see her home again, and carried off his daughters, saying, it was hardly reasonable to break in upon their first evening.

Mrs. Selby did not urge them to remain that night, as the travellers were fatigued with their journey.

“For my part, I was never so really glad to see old Stanley before,” said Arthur, laughing, “for I do think it would have been a most uncommon bore for both Sandford and myself to have had to escort those fair damsels home ; don’t you think so, Sandford?”

“Yes, indeed, I do ; and, moreover, if it had not been for your civility, I do not think I could have done so.”

Fatigue was now pleaded by Mr. and Lady Anne Lyndsay, and shortly afterwards the two sisters retired with their mother.

CHAPTER XIV.

THAT night Catherine remained late in her mother's chamber: they talked long and earnestly about Lord Sandford. Indeed, they often discussed this subject. Now that he was older, since they should meet constantly, Catherine wished to know whether she was to consider herself as bound to him, or not. She hid her blushing face on her mother's shoulder, as she declared repeatedly that she loved him dearly, and could never love any other. Her mother was perplexed; for, of late, Lady Sandford had laid great stress on her son's poverty, and the impossibility of Sandford marrying just yet. Still, looking on Catherine as the one who would be his choice, she was puzzled and distressed to know how to reply to her child. Not but at that moment she felt persuaded that he was deeply attached to her—to her whom he had so long looked on as his future wife;

but she had seen the fond hopes of one child blighted, when much nearer their final consummation than Catherine's, and she dreaded leading her on to expect too much.

"Dearest child," Mrs. Selby began, at length, "we have every reason to hope, from what we have seen of Sandford this evening, that his feeling of attachment for you is as unchanged as yours is for him. He remains with us some time; and you will quickly perceive what are his sentiments. You are not deficient in good sense or tact, my love," she added, smiling fondly on her child; "and, in an affair of this kind, the latter quality is even more needed than the first. He is apparently all we could desire for you; and your being such a great favourite with his mother and sister is all in your favour. Arthur is delighted with him, and tells me he can talk of nothing but your charms. All this looks well; and though I meant to caution you against thinking of him too seriously, I find my lecture ends with quite a different meaning. And now, dearest child, go to bed. God bless you, my love! sleep well, and rise refreshed and ready for any scheme that Arthur and Sandford may have planned for your amusement. I am at a loss what more

to say, sweet love, till he has declared himself a little more explicitly — once more, good-night ;” and, fondly kissing Catherine, Mrs. Selby bade her retire to rest.

Catherine was blest with a sanguine disposition : she foresaw none of those difficulties that were agitating her mother : she saw the bright side of everything : she looked upon herself as his future wife ; and already fancied Elizabeth and the younger children her brothers and sisters : she fell asleep, amid visions of bliss and happiness—bright and fair. Once only can such be seen—they are then gone for ever. Never, in any love in after life, is there such supreme felicity—such happiness as was felt that night by our fair heroine. Her dreams were certainly all *couleur de rose* : but even they prevented her reposing soundly, and she awoke next morning unrefreshed, and with a headache. Her toilette finished, she hastened into the garden, to try if the fresh air would not revive her. Scarcely had she reached the lawn when Sandford approached her with a large bouquet of roses and carnations.

“Why are you up so early, Catherine?” asked he, tenderly : “I thought you were fast asleep, and crept down stairs very gently, not

to awake you. This bouquet is for you ; but I must tie it up."

"Thank you much : they are lovely, quite lovely !"

"I see you have not forgotten your old word of lovely, Kitty, since we parted at Harden : but you look pale."

"Only a little headache, which will go off by-and-by. Shall we take a turn in the hanging garden ?—it will be cooler, and refresh me."

"There is nothing I should so much enjoy," he said ; and they started off together : but they had not proceeded far before they were recalled to the house by the sound of the prayer bell.

Whether it was the freshness of the morning air, the sight of Sandford, or the sweet-smelling flowers, or a combination of all these together, we know not ; but Catherine's headache was quite forgotten.

The afternoon was spent in rowing up and down the river : the air was delicious ; and as they floated listlessly with the stream, Catherine and Susan sang some little duets, to the great delight of their brother Arthur.

"Is James as fond of music as ever ?" in-

quired Catherine of Lord Sandford. "I know you are not very partial to it."

"Oh, yes, I am, I have heard so much at Cambridge from my friend Melville, that I have grown quite fond of it. I am sure you would like Melville, he is such a good fellow : so good-humoured."

"I hope some day I may see him," she replied. "But, really, is it not charming on the water this evening?"

"What do you say, Catherine, to having a pic-nic at Harden Hall? My mother begs I will ask Mr. Selby to be kind enough to go there with me ; and really, if the weather is fine, I do not see why we should not all go, and have great fun."

"Charming, most charming," exclaimed Susan, with great animation ; "we should all enjoy it. I am sure I should, Sandford, above everything ; for I have not been there for ages."

"Nor have I ; so let us go in a body, when we reach the house, to Mr. Selby, with Arthur at our head—for he is never refused anything—and request the honour of his company to our pic-nic, and the *use* (or *abuse*) of his carriage."

"Well," said Arthur, "why not go to-

morrow? Depend on it, there is nothing like making hay when the sun shines: and you, Sandford, you ought to go and look after your own affairs. My father means you, now you are arrived at man's estate, to turn your hand to business; and the sooner the better."

"I know what business I should undertake first, if I was of age," replied Sandford, fixing his large, full eyes on Catherine's face, with too plain a meaning to be misunderstood by any. Rather an awkward silence succeeded, which Arthur, feeling it must be unpleasant to his sister, exerted himself to break, saying that, for his part, he thought nothing more agreeable than a pic-nic, and that he had never in his life enjoyed anything so much as he had done the pic-nic at Harden Hall when he was a boy.

The conversation now became general. But Catherine was lost in far too happy visions of love and hope to think much more of the pic-nic. Lord Sandford's words, spoken with such obvious regard to herself, had quite set her mind at rest as to his intentions; and had quite confirmed all that she had before conceived of him. She was for that time supremely happy—how sad that she should be awakened from such bliss! and all by the chat-

ting of some of the younger part of the family, who did not comprehend why Catherine should look so happy, and not speak. Arthur's kind consideration again interposed to draw off their attention from his sister. Lord Sandford was leaning back in the boat; the far distant hills were illumined by the setting sun; and his own superb woods stood forth conspicuously: he felt most happy. As they landed, he gave his arm to Catherine, and before the others were half out of the boat he led her along another path away from the rest of the party. What passed during that short stroll, certainly did not dissipate any of the pleasurable emotions of either party. As they reached the house, Sandford said,—“Catherine, you are mine! the moment it is in my power, you shall be mine, dearest, for ever! You know why this cannot be immediately.” At the door they were met by Mr. Selby, who certainly did not appear displeased at seeing his daughter thus engaged alone in conversation with his ward; and merely saying to them, with a sweet smile, “May it be ever thus!” he passed on. The two young lovers parted in the hall, and Catherine sought her mother, that she might pour out the overflow-

ings of her happy heart to her ; adding, that they had agreed, if their respective parents thought it advisable, not to announce their engagements publicly till near the time.

“ How much I wish he was of age ! ” exclaimed Mrs. Selby.

“ So do I,” rejoined Catherine, “ dearest mother ; but it does not signify much : we are all in all to each other—nothing can separate us.” Her mother sighed : it was a long time to look forward to ; and she detested long engagements : but she would not let her daughter perceive that she was less sanguine than the happy girl, who went on expatiating on the felicity that awaited her future years. “ There is only one thing,” Catherine continued, “ that I do not quite like ; which is, that Sandford tells me his mother is for ever harping upon heiresses ! That odious Miss Rabbit,—detestable woman,—put it into her head ; and she also tried to persuade Lady Sandford that I was seeking to get the upper hand of her son, and endeavoured to make her jealous of my influence. Sandford assures me, however, that this is only a passing fancy, and will all blow over, and that I am a prime favourite with his mother.”

“ That, my love, is very satisfactory ; and

as to the other story, foolish and weak as his mother has generally been considered, I do not think she could possibly be silly enough to be jealous of you. Miss Rabbit was never a favourite of mine."

The dinner-bell here interrupted their conversation, and Catherine, in the delightful society of Lord Sandford, soon forgot any petty annoyance. He was devoted to her, and attempted not to conceal it: there was no need. The family were alone, and they of course were pretty well aware how matters stood.

The conversation turning that evening on the new high-church opinions that were just then making a stir in the world, Mr. Lyndsay (who, by-the-by, we have of late sadly neglected) inquired of Lord Sandford what effect they had had at the university; and how far he himself went with all these self-styled *new lights*?

"Not very far," replied his lordship: "in some cases, I think, they have undoubtedly done good; but in my own college much harm. Men that were a short time ago good friends, now rail at one another: they stigmatize one another with the nick-names of high church and low church, and by so doing bring

great opprobrium on religion; while those men who before were freethinkers are confirmed in their ideas, and ask, what doctrines they are to believe? For some say a man cannot be saved if the clergyman preaches in a black gown; others, that if a man does not neglect every other duty, for the purpose of going twice a day to church, he cannot hope for salvation. Then another steps in and says, every one must judge for himself; that there is no use trying to force people to believe anything which they cannot thoroughly and rationally believe. So they go on squabbling from morning till night; while the Roman Catholics stand by rejoicing at these dissensions: saying that all Puseyites are but Papists in disguise, and that there are priests and Jesuits in every part of the kingdom labouring to convert the people. It is most sad; and, indeed, Mr. Lyndsay, I only speak of what I myself have seen."

"I quite agree with you, Lord Sandford; quite enter into all you say. I also have heard it asserted, that there is at least one Jesuit to every village in England: and of late how many Popish processions there have been; how many Popish chapels,—and indeed some cathe-

drals, built within the last fifty years, which formerly would have never been allowed."

"But you know," said Mr. Selby, "we are told to expect a fierce struggle between the Romanists and ourselves ; and all these sad changes are but too probably signs of the approaching tempest. But," he added, in a gayer tone, "one thing we cannot doubt, which is that our pure church will finally prevail against the corruption of Popery. The worst part of the story is, that so many calling themselves clergymen of the Protestant church, are, in fact, nothing better than Popish priests. Yes, people may soften it, by calling them Roman Catholics instead of Papists ; but the spirit, the essence of Popery remains the same as it was at the time of our glorious Reformation."

"But that is another point," interrupted Lord Sandford, "on which the young upstarts of the present day pour their abuse. Yet there is something very flattering to human pride in the tenets they hold ; so much so that I should be very sorry to be domiciled with Papists : they turn and twist everything with such subtlety to serve their own ends, that I fear I should get quite bewildered."

"I am sure I hope, dear Sandford, you may

never be exposed to this terrible trial: their religion is one which works strongly on the imagination; the music, the pomp, make it most bewitching to young heads. But remember all your life that if you are in difficulty, or I can assist you, no trouble shall be spared on my part to do so."

For some time longer, Lord Sandford conversed very sensibly on this subject; and Mr. Selby was very glad to find that the principles he had endeavoured to instil had taken deep root in this good soil. He concluded, by mentioning that at his college there were a set of young men,—not remarkable for talent, or genius, or birth, but desirous of some notoriety, — who had become ardent admirers of Mr. Newman: one in particular—a Mr. Hawkins—who, I believe, considers every one a sinner but himself. I only hope," he added, "that I may never, by any chance, make his acquaintance: his appearance is anything but prepossessing."

Little did his lordship think, as he said this, what vast influence this very person would, in later years, exercise over himself; and the misery such influence would cause to some now sitting in that room. Per-

haps there is no blessing so seldom acknowledged, so little thought of, as that merciful dispensation of Providence which shrouds in obscurity the future. Could we foresee the many ills which the most favoured in this life are heirs to,—we should be deprived of nearly, if not all power of enjoying the present.

Great was the pleasure expressed by all the party at the beauty of the morning on which they had arranged to have their pic-nic at Harden Hall. Arthur gazed with fond admiration on his two sisters, as they appeared ready equipped for this expedition. Their fresh smiling faces, peeping out from beneath simple straw bonnets, entwined with roses, certainly added somewhat to the charms of the party; and Arthur could not resist saying, he had never seen either of them look so well.

The next thing to be arranged was to stow away such a large party in the different carriages.

“The only thing I request, Mrs. Selby,” said Lord Sandford, “is, that Catherine, if I may ask so great a favour, will accompany me on the box of the barouche.”

“I shall be delighted,” she replied.

“Now then, let us proceed,” said Mr. Selby; “you can all please yourselves as to seats, only leave one for me,” he added, laughing; and at eleven o’clock off they started.

They were not long in reaching Harden Hall; the noble owner of which had, unknown to Mr. Selby, ordered some few preparations for their reception. But the beauty of the day prompted them to extend their walk down to the lake; a large piece of water, more than a mile in extent: originally a little stream, it had been widened by artificial means, and converted into a lake. There was a sufficient breeze to cause a slight ripple on the surface of the water. The children were in ecstasies of delight with a little yacht that was moored in the middle of the lake; the sailing of which had been once a constant source of amusement, but now that Lord Sandford was generally absent, it lay at anchor, and added greatly to the beauty of the scene. The hills on one side rose up abruptly from the water’s edge, and were studded with trees from the summit to their base; and in passing along, the scene was continually changing. Little bays

and creeks came unexpectedly in view, with every possible variety of scenery. On a rising ground, over a bank of evergreen shrubs, might be seen the ruins of a Grecian temple: then, unexpectedly, a terrace led round a headland, to a magnificent grove of oaks, with a wider expanse of water. This completed the enchantment of the scene.

Further on, was seen a Chinese pagoda and a humble imitation of a Swiss cottage, where it was agreed to partake of the good fare Mrs. Selby had provided. The views from the different windows were lovely: the foliage of the trees was in its greatest beauty; and the bright tints of the beech contrasted admirably with the dark hue of some old Scotch firs, with their picturesque red bark.

While their early dinner was preparing, Lord Sandford proposed walking to the end of the lake, to shew his friends the waterfall. All were charmed with the proposal; and they started off in a westerly direction. Sounds of falling water were heard; and, after winding through shaded paths, they arrived at the bottom of a small hill. "Now," exclaimed Sandford, "look up!" Bursts of surprise and delight were heard on all sides. "How

lovely! Do look!—do look! Did you ever see anything so pretty?” Lord Sandford felt highly delighted that his place excited so much admiration; and, after allowing the children to ramble about as long as they wished, he gave his arm to Catherine, and led the way to the Swiss cottage.

After their simple meal was over, Mr. and Lady Anne Lyndsay returned home, expressing to Lord Sandford how much pleasure they had received, and how much they admired his place. He thanked them both for their kindness in joining his pic-nic, and expressed a wish that before long they would again visit Harden Hall.

The remainder of the party returned to the house; and, when there, Lord Sandford, having obtained permission from Mrs. Selby, took hold of Catherine's hand, and gently detached her from the rest of the party. In answer to her eager inquiry, where he was going to lead her, said, “Do not you know the way to the yew walk?” He added not another word. But as Catherine felt him warmly press her hand in his, she guessed—yet, strange to say, almost dreaded—what he was going to say. They soon arrived at the

very spot they had at first plighted their troth ; and there again Lord Sandford repeated all, and much more than he had then said. "One year is all that now intervenes before we are for ever united. Oh, Catherine !" he continued, "tell me once more that I am your first, your only love !"

Her blushing countenance spoke more than words. Yet still he wished to hear one word of assent. She placed her hand in his ; and, in a voice scarcely audible from emotion, said, "I am unchanged ; and here renew the solemn pledges I then gave ! My love to you is my life !"

"God bless you, dearest Catherine, for these transporting words !"

What more passed in that interview can be easily imagined ; and they quitted the yew walk elated with those happy and joyous feelings that belong to a first attachment. They fancied themselves bound by an indissoluble tie, the severance of which they could not imagine that any circumstances whatever could by any possibility occasion ; for their hearts were firmly united. Catherine felt that with such a helpmate she could pass through life the happiest of the happy.

Soon after their return to the house, the whole party signified their willingness to return to Torrington, after a day's pleasure more unalloyed than often happens.

Mr. and Mrs. Selby were highly gratified that evening, when Lord Sandford formally asked of them the hand of their daughter; and cordially did they accede to his request, that for the future they should consider him as one of the family. Arthur was no less gratified and pleased; and so happy and cheerful were all the party at the Rectory, that the summer months and even autumn glided away most rapidly. All was so bright, so joyous, that Mrs. Selby sometimes trembled when she thought of it. Such unspeakable bliss, without one drawback, is rarely experienced in this life; and she could not help feeling anxious for her darling child, lest any unforeseen event should interrupt this delirium of early love.

But it is full time to inquire after some of our actors whom we have so long forgotten. As we leave the *primá donna* in such bliss, we shall retire for a short time behind the scenes, and learn something respecting the redoubtable family of Read, and what machinations have since been engendered in the fertile brain of Lady Julia.

CHAPTER XV.

WE left Howell suffering from fearful visions, that had driven all sleep and repose from her eyelids. She rose up, pale and exhausted with mental anxiety and terror; for she knew that unless the child was in her hands by Monday, Lady Julia would not give her any reward. That day she went again to Dr. Allen's house, but found that the boy was from home, walking with his kind nurse. The servant, not particularly liking Howell's appearance, did not ask her to wait; and she, though bold and impudent, could not summon up courage to request permission to remain till he returned. She wandered about the streets till the afternoon, and then called again: he was still out. "He shall rue this," she muttered to herself, "as sure as my name is Howell. I am not going to be kept waiting in this way." Cross and irritated she returned home,

and prepared some sugar plums to give the child; they appeared like pink almonds, and she hoped, by their bright colour, they would please him. There was no single thing in which she took any interest: although she was surrounded by numberless people on all sides,—there was not one who had the slightest regard for her; who would give her even a day's lodging. Perhaps this very feeling kept off all feelings of remorse from her: she was only vexed to think that another day must elapse before she could get a sight of the boy. If she could once get him into her power she thought she should feel happier. Wretched, thrice wretched woman! Much did she rejoice to hear the rain pelting against her windows the next morning; as that would effectually prevent Miss Allen from venturing out of doors. Muffling herself up in a large cloak, and drawing her bonnet close over her eyes, she started for the doctor's house. She neither heeded the wind nor rain, nor the splashing of the carriages, nor the prying eyes of all she met—she heeded none of these things; she was too much engrossed with her own thoughts scarcely to perceive them. On reaching Dr. Allen's door, she strove to collect her ideas a

little, and to appear composed; she inquired after Miss Allen, and was told she was within. Highly delighted at this, she hastened to take off her cloak, and begged to be allowed immediately to see the dear child. A sneer passed over the footman's face as he heard these words, for he began to suspect she was not exactly the kind of visitor Miss Allen would like to receive. She followed him up stairs. Miss Allen started on seeing her visitor, and glanced fearfully round the room for the child; she felt an incomprehensible dislike to this woman, and as the man left the room desired him to let his master know Mrs. Stratton had arrived. He quickly returned with the unwelcome intelligence to poor Miss Allen that he was not at home; this was a great relief to Howell. Little Arthur came close to her, and gazed at the stranger in a frightened manner; he then gave a scream, and threw himself down, crying, "Mother!" All colour for the moment left her cheeks; but, fortunately for her, Miss Allen was too much occupied in trying to pacify the child to observe her visitor. His strong emotion confirming the dislike that she had taken to her visitor, she turned towards Howell, say-

ing that she was particularly engaged at that time, and begged her to call again some other day. But Howell was not to be so easily baffled : she did not offer to move, and, in a voice so harsh and coarse that it frightened her fair auditor, said, she would not leave the house till some reasons satisfactory to herself could be given her that the child was well and happy. This information she could not obtain unless Miss Allen left them alone together. "Mrs. Stratton," she replied, in a quiet, firm tone, "I leave not this room. You can, if you please, remain till my father returns ; but you shall not even touch the child ;" and she took him in her arms, and with great composure rang the bell. "James," she said, when the man answered her summons, "do you remain in this room till my father returns. This poor woman is so strange, I cannot answer for the consequences if we are left alone."

"Cannot you, indeed?" retorted Howell. "Perhaps, young lady, the result may be different from what you expect."

This was the day in which she was to claim her reward, and, thought she, there is no reason why I should not claim it : at least I

can swear the child is safely concealed. Yet how ill he looks! I will never injure a hair of his head, poor boy!

Arthur was now quiet, but as white as snow; and big tears rolled down his pale cheeks. Miss Allen was too discreet to make any inquiries while her visitor remained; but she noticed his emotion, and determined to discover what had so completely upset him at the sight of this woman. More than an hour passed in silence, when Howell's restless spirit getting tired of this delay, she rose to depart; saying, they should hear more of her. Her presence was so hateful to the young lady, that, after Howell left the house, it appeared as if she had escaped from some fearful calamity.

She then inquired of Arthur where he could have seen this woman: a still whiter hue spread over his cheeks as he said, in a hurried voice, "Oh, do not ask me. I do not know. I have seen her—it must have been with mama—yes, it must have been then. But her only nurse was called Howell, and this woman called herself Stratton. I think I am going crazy," he added, in a piteous voice, putting his hand to his head, "for my head seems on fire—so burning."

“Poor darling!” replied his kind nurse, “you shall lie down on the bed while I sing you to sleep.” She herself felt sorrowful and heavy. Her father had said it was doubtful whether the child would live or not; and that ghastly expression which she had never witnessed till that day, made her feel doubly anxious. She tended him as a young mother would her first-born babe: but the poor boy appeared restless, and frequently inquired whether that dreadful woman would come back; for that he could not bear to see her again. She gently assured him there was no fear of that; so, becoming more composed, he dozed a little, but frequently started up, looking distressed; at length being exhausted, he slept soundly. Miss Allen remained by his bed-side the rest of that day.

The rain and wind had now increased frightfully, and about eight o’clock the gale was so tremendous that the streets appeared deserted. It poured against Miss Allen’s window so furiously that she began to be alarmed, and felt seriously anxious at her father’s long absence.

This hurricane of wind did not disturb the child, who slept soundly. Not a ray of light

was to be seen: the darkness was so thick as effectually to obscure the light of the lamps. For two hours did it rage thus, and then appeared to subside; though it was but the lull which forewarns us of the approaching storm. Very shortly afterwards, a peal of thunder was heard, so loud, so awfully loud, that it appeared like a discharge of artillery close to the house. Peal after peal followed in the most fearful manner: it was such a scene as is more often witnessed in tropical climes than in the streets of London.

The clock of a neighbouring church had barely struck eleven, when loud cries of "Fire!" were heard. In an agony of terror Miss Allen rushed to the window to see where the fire was.

"Good heavens!" she exclaimed, in a voice distracted with grief, "it is our house that is in flames!"

She seized hold of a blanket, and wrapping it tightly round the child, rushed down the passage to get to her brother's room. The door was bolted. In vain she thumped against it, and by her frantic screams endeavoured to awaken him. She knew not what to do. She could scarcely keep her senses collected. The

staircase was in flames! She heard a well known voice—it was her father's, frantically calling on some one to save his child! She ran back to her bed-room: it was quite detached from the rest of the house, so that when she had bade the family good-night, she was quite isolated from them. Never till this moment had it struck her, that in case of fire, with the passage door closed, she was inevitably lost. The furiousness of the wind had made it advisable to close this door. The flames approached nearer: she heard their fatal crackling. She heard the crash of the staircase falling in: the smoke found its way through the crevices, and had nearly stifled her. She gave up all for lost: all hope of escape failed her when she observed the insatiable flames approaching nearer to her, creeping round the sides and bottom of the door. She made a desperate effort—roused herself,—and rushing to the window, called out to some one to take the child.

“Yes, I will; and willingly,” said a harsh voice, “if you will throw him out.”

She heeded not its roughness. With super-human strength for a form so fragile, she tossed a mattress from the window: then

tying a sheet round the child, imprinted a fervent kiss on his cold brow.

“Great God!” she exclaimed, “he is dead! —he is cold!”

“Throw him out, Miss!” said the same harsh voice: “it is his only chance; if you keep him there, he dies, to a certainty!”

“The fire increases!” shrieked many voices: “if you cannot throw him and yourself out quickly, you will be burnt to death!”

With a convulsive effort, she let the child fall down on the mattress. But the excitement was too great: the intense agony of mind she had suffered had stunned her own senses for ever. In vain the bystanders entreated her to throw herself from the window: in vain they pointed to the child, and even held him up, to try and entice her to leave that awful room. All was in vain. Perfectly motionless, she remained sitting on the window sill till the flames appeared rushing towards her. She rose, shrieking “I am coming—I am coming—spare me a minute—I come—I come!” and with a shriek, that chilled the blood of the assembled crowd, she flew into the middle of the room—into the heart of the flames. A sensation of the most

intense horror pervaded the multitude at this moment—at this terrific scream, [and the knowledge of the still more terrific death she must endure; and a breathless silence pervaded them all. A few moments passed, when another shriek was heard—a groan, and all was still; save the fierce flames, which spread on every side—now raging furiously where, a few seconds before, this young girl had sat. Men, whose weatherbeaten, hardened countenances looked as if many a year had passed since they had given way to such emotions, now felt the tears slowly trickling down their cheeks at the awful fate of this young creature. To prevent the destructive element from spreading, the adjoining houses had been destroyed; but the wind continued so furious, that it was with difficulty others could be saved. As for Dr. Allen's house, not a vestige of it remained: it was a heap of blackened ruins. His family were all saved, excepting his firstborn child—his noble daughter. Her screams haunted him for ever after. But, where was her adopted child—the child whose life she had attempted to preserve in sacrificing her own? She had undertaken to fulfil a mother's part to this

neglected boy, and nobly and generously had she acted up to her duty ; sacrificing even life itself to save the child of her adoption.

That night, Howell had slept near Miss Allen's place of abode. But the fierceness of the raging elements, the roaring wind, the furious rain, banished sleep from most eyes. Tossing from side to side, with feverish impatience, Howell was at length aroused by cries of "Fire ! fire !" Madly she rushed from the house into the street. All was enshrouded in impenetrable darkness, excepting the one spot where stood Dr. Allen's house.

"Good heavens !" thought the wretched woman, "the boy will be burnt—how awful !" and with frantic strides she hastened to the spot where the destructive flames were raging with terrific violence. She sees Miss Allen's despair ; she conjures her to throw out the child. Her voice, even in that din of Babel, sounds harsh. Seeing no alternative, his kind protector did, as has been already observed, what was desired of her ; and the woman who had so basely requited Mrs. Read's kindness, was now in possession of her only child !

Vainly did the distracted father and mother seek their own or their adopted child : neither

could be found; and at length they were obliged to come to the sad conclusion that both had perished in the flames, or been stifled by the volumes of smoke.

"It was a fearful death for one so young, so beloved," said the faithful old servant. He assisted the labourers who were employed in searching over the embers, as soon as the intense heat would permit them; and while they were employed in this mournful task, after having succeeded in removing a large portion, though without the desired success, they were startled by the appearance of a woman, apparently emerging from the ruins, in a long black cloak.

"What are you seeking for?" said she, in a hollow, harsh voice, to the old man-servant.

"Dead men's bones," was the laconic reply.

"Why," continued his interrogator, "was not this the house where Allen the doctor lived and his proud daughter?"

"Who are you," demanded the old man, almost fiercely, "who comes here to abuse as good an angel as ever lived? But let me tell you, you are a good-for-nothing beggar, so be off;" and he pushed her roughly away. She muttered something angry and revenge-

ful against him, but he heard not her words.

After having received the child, more dead than alive, from the unfortunate girl's arms, Howell regarded him with a look of pity; she felt his cold lips, but thought he had only fainted. In those same arms which had so often nursed and fondled him—which had afterwards, by the dreadful act of robbery, deprived him of a home—of every blessing that was left to a motherless boy—did he now lie, perfectly motionless. Howell felt then that the fruits of her wicked act were long in coming; as she wrapped the black cloak round his body, and started off for her home. With rapid steps she traversed the streets, when suddenly she stopped, saying, to herself, "Fool that I was to bring away the child! why did I not leave him there, and it would have been supposed he had been stunned, and died from the fall." But it was not so to be; she felt an irresistible impulse to take him home with her: step by step was she led on against her previous opinion. As she entered Piccadilly, she encountered a long string of carriages, filled with youth and beauty: one in particular, as she passed them, attracted her atten-

tion ; it contained an elderly person and a girl evidently very young, in whose fair face there was a freshness and brightness which attracted even Howell's eyes. Little did that fair girl imagine what a guilty wretch stood so near her—little did she imagine that the pale and haggard look which called forth her pity, was caused by the love of lucre stifling every other feeling, and leading her to the commission of such wicked deeds as would have frozen her young blood to have heard of. The gay *cortége* passed on, the last carriage had rolled away, and with the almost lifeless body of the poor child in her arms, this miserable woman crossed the street to enter her lodgings.

It was now between twelve and one o'clock when she arrived at the door ; she was so much terrified as scarcely to have strength to proceed, and cursed her folly that she had not abandoned the boy in the street, for she was pretty nearly overcome by his weight : but it was too late to repent this act, and she must enter. Two men sat near the fire-side, so deeply engaged in conversation that they did not perceive her till she was nearly across the room ; when starting up they demanded fiercely what she wanted. Summoning up all her

sang froid, she replied, "She had been out late, and was going to bed."

"Out late! out stealing! Why, woman, what is this under your cloak?"

"Hands off, man!" retorted Howell, throwing him off her with a desperate effort; "hands off! or I will scream till a policeman comes."

Thinking it possible her threat might prove true, he relinquished his hold, and she rushed up stairs, quickly sought her room, and locking the door after her, sat down: but still she held the almost lifeless form upon her knee. All power of thought seemed to have fled from her: she could not, dared not reflect upon what had passed. For many hours she remained in this stupor, occasionally looking at the child, but more often gazing with wildness at the door of her apartment. At length rousing herself, she resolved instantly to strike a light, and administer some cordial to the boy. He could not swallow it; but after having chafed his cold hands in hers, and rubbed his chest, a gleam of animation was apparent in what to her had appeared an inanimate form. With increased vigour she renewed her exertions, but he seemed almost

insensible: gradually, however, she perceived a slight return of consciousness, and had at length the happiness of seeing him open his eyes. He started with wild terror at beholding in whose arm she was lying: but she conjured him to be silent, saying his life depended on it. Poor child! he was as one in a feverish dream, and did not rightly understand where he was.

Suddenly Howell was startled by hearing footsteps again approaching. At length she fancied she heard footsteps slowly creeping up the stairs—it was the heavy tread of a man. A cold dew spread over her face; her hands fell powerless by her side; her tongue clave to the roof of her mouth: the flickering, uncertain flame of the rushlight had just expired—all was wrapped in the shroud of darkness. She heard the step slowly reach her door, and a hand striving cautiously and gently to open it, but she had not the power to move. Finding it bolted, the intruder, whoever he might have been, retreated stealthily down stairs again, and Howell breathed once more.

Having recovered from this fright, and being thoroughly exhausted with anxiety, both body and mind, she laid the child near her,

and sank into a deep sleep. How long she continued in this state she knew not; but the sun had risen high in the heavens before she awoke. The child was much revived, and she hesitated what to do with him. She had determined to proceed to Lady Julia Read, to explain to her all that had taken place. She need not be absent many hours; and she thought the boy might remain safely where he was for the present. He scarcely spoke; and after giving him a little breakfast, she left him, alone and ill, in a tavern of the lowest description.

CHAPTER XVI.

So swiftly did the days pass at the Rectory, that the chilliness of the autumnal evenings was beginning to be felt. The scarlet geranium, the crimson verbena, and other late flowers, were in their full beauty; and as Catherine picked them to entwine in her dark hair, she could not resist a smile of satisfaction and pleasure, as she thought that though others might not admire her, yet in the eyes of one she was all that was fair and bright. In the village, when she visited the poor cottagers, and listened to all their distresses, she had now in Lord Sandford a constant companion: all her family were equally attentive and anxious to relieve the wants of their poorer neighbours, but these two young creatures apparently took a more active part, and were seen to glide from cottage to cottage blest by all who saw them. If all the bless-

ings which were showered upon them—if all the good wishes which were expressed for both could have been fulfilled, they would have been blest indeed. Lord Sandford frequently spoke to Catherine of a small chapel which was situated in his park, and now in ruins, nothing but the outer walls remaining. He often spoke of his desire to restore it and have a chaplain there; for the parish church was some miles distant; he found Catherine most ready and willing to enter into all his plans, and quite as anxious as he himself was to see the little building restored to the sacred use for which it had been designed. The building itself was not noted for any architectural beauty, though placed in a lovely situation. On either side of the lake the hills rose, thickly clothed with wood; half way down the hill was seen the ruined chapel, rising on a grassy knoll. The windows were all gone save one, and one of Lord Sandford's first projects was the restoring them with painted glass.

“But you will not glaze all the windows with stained glass?” said Catherine; “why, Sandford, it will be a most enormous expense. Do you not think it will be more appropriate

in the chancel only? Besides," she continued, "I remember once seeing a beautiful church in Gloucestershire, which, even on a very bright sunny day in the height of summer, was so dark, owing to the dimness of the painted glass, that the old clerk could scarcely get through the service."

"This is the first time, dear Catherine, that we have ever held different opinions, and it is on the very last subject I should have imagined it possible to have done so." He then, in the mildest manner, explained all his plans; and she heartily entered into all his improvements, with the sole exception of every window being stained glass.

Many and long were the walks that the two lovers took together, till the dreaded day arrived on which Catherine was to take her departure for Claremont; where her Majesty was at that time residing. When her father heard the lamentations that were expressed by all the party, he laughingly said, "That this would be the last time but one in which Catherine would be summoned."

"Yes, indeed," said Sandford, "that is a great comfort, dearest Catherine; and although we shall be far apart from each other,

yet you have promised to let me hear from you very often, very often indeed."

"And you also, Sandford, have promised to write to me. We shall meet at Christmas, though not before, I fear."

With that carriage departed all Lord Sandford's true enjoyment: even Arthur, who was his greatest friend, could not for some days rouse him. But after he had received letters from Catherine written more cheerfully, though deeply grieved at being obliged to leave him, he resumed his usual occupations, and appeared more composed indeed; yet for hours he might frequently be seen to hold a book in his hand, as if he were reading, but without turning over a single leaf. At the end of the week he was required to join his mother and sisters at the seaside. All his family were highly delighted at the idea of his projected marriage; but Miss Rabbit, in spite of all her endeavours to pretend to approve of it, found it very difficult at all times to put on one of those bland smiles when this subject was discussed. She had not such complete command over herself as to conceal that she was extremely chagrined at his lord-

ship's presence. At first he was most highly amused at this, and used to quizz her unmercifully behind her back, to the great amusement of Elizabeth, and the indignation of her mother.

Miss Rabbit was continually throwing out hints about money and heiresses when she could catch Lady Sandford's ear; and insinuating how desirable it would be for her son to marry an heiress; that as to his marrying Miss Selby, it was too absurd: of course there would be no harm in his carrying on this flirtation for the next year; but it was scarcely possible that her ladyship should be pleased at his connecting himself in such a way when he was of age.

"I have nothing to say against the match, and I like the girl extremely, Miss Rabbit. More money would be acceptable; but one cannot have everything, and I think such a sensible and amiable girl, of as good a family as his own, constitutes a very good match. They will not be rich as long as I live; but afterwards they will do very well."

"Do very well, indeed," retorted Miss Rabbit; "*a mighty grand match* for a country clergyman's daughter."

“ I do not see that,” returned Lady Sandford; “ she is born to anything.”

“ Anything she can get, like the rest of us,” retorted Miss Rabbit.

Her ladyship was almost angry at this remark (and more is the pity she had not been angry before); which her flattering, palavering companion perceiving, immediately changed the subject, and began talking of the improvements that would be necessary at Harden Hall for the young couple. “ Why, really,” she added, “ to think that in another year his lordship will be married ! ”

“ And why should not his lordship be married by this time next year ? ” asked the young lord himself, entering the room at this moment. “ I tell you what, Miss Rabbit, if you are interfering in all my affairs in this way, we shall never be friends. You seem to imagine that you are entitled to lecture my mother on all occasions; and also to dictate to me about my affairs. I will not submit to such interference; and now I must beg that you will leave me alone with my mother.”

“ Now or never ! ” said the enraged Miss Rabbit to herself; “ now or never, shall I obtain any influence over him. He is weak,

and easily led: now for it." She continued aloud, "Lord Sandford, you have spoken very strangely, and I shall leave this house within an hour, unless you offer me some apology;" and she flung herself out of the room in a glowing rage, as Lord Sandford expressed it.

"Well," he exclaimed, "let her go in an hour's time—I don't care!"

"Oh, Sandford! but, indeed, I do care very much: you have been rude and ungentleman-like."

"Well, mother, all I say is, that it is enough to provoke the patience of Job himself, to have such a woman as this, all day long, trying to disgust you with my future life. The envious soul!—she wants to be Lady Sandford herself!"

"Nonsense, Sandford, nonsense! here, sit down, and talk with me: I will make your peace with her afterwards."

His mother apparently listened with the most affectionate interest to all he said, as he discussed his future prospects; at the same time that she held in her hand a volume of Metastasio, which always afforded her much more pleasure than listening to the affairs of her children. But, after a few

minutes, better feelings influenced her ; she roused herself, and became deeply interested in all her son's plans. He detailed at length all that had passed between himself and Catherine—all the *petites tendresses* that had passed between them. He doated on his mother ; and as he went on in this strain, she frequently exclaimed, it was exactly what his father would have done : so much did this remind her of her own youthful days, that it quite obliterated all angry feelings which had been roused by his little altercation with her favourite Miss Rabbit. “ I only wish,” she added, “ that you could have been married at once. I must allow that I see great objections to that clause in your father's will, though I am quite convinced that none but the most conscientious motives of his duty to you, actuated him.”

“ No one, dearest mother, can be more satisfied of that than myself ; and Catherine also : but this postponement is sadly vexatious ! ”

“ It is, indeed,” replied his mother, “ sad for both. When you return from college, ask her to spend some weeks with us ; and you will meet at all the winter balls. I am indeed thankful ——”

Here her ladyship was interrupted by the

entrance of Miss Rabbit, who, with a crimson face, said her luggage was ready ; and she supposed she might order the carriage. Even Lady Sandford was astonished at such unparalleled insolence from her favourite. But her son, with true good breeding, jumped up, and, approaching the virago, said, "Miss Rabbit, I fear I spoke hastily, perhaps rather strongly to you, just now : for that receive my apologies. But remember, I beseech you, that you are in this house as governess and teacher to my little sisters ; not as dictator to my mother or myself. We shall meet again this evening ;" and, courteously opening the door, he bowed her from the room.

"Why, I remember," he continued to his mother, "when that good lady scarcely dared open her lips before me ; and never ventured to differ from you on a single subject : was it not so ?"

"It was so, my dear : but I find her very useful, in a variety of ways."

"Surely my sister Elizabeth is the first to be consulted : much before Miss Rabbit."

"Not by me, Sandford : she is very young, and I do not choose to consult her," and a pang of jealousy shot through her heart.

"That is a pity, dear mother, I think ; she

is so sensible, so good : besides," he added, as if no other reason could be so convincing, " Mr. Selby always consults Catherine on every subject ; so that when we marry," he added, smiling gaily, " she will be fully competent to manage my establishment."

At dinner he met his favourite sister Elizabeth : she was both lively and quiet, devoted to her brothers, and not being over partial to Miss Rabbit, felt not a little pleasure when that lady received from either of them a *quietus*. She had never, from the first, liked her governess ; nor was her affection likely to increase when she saw, from day to day, her mother's dependence on Miss Rabbit increase : and the way in which she lorded it over that mother was, in the eyes of Elizabeth, very disgusting.

In the evening, Miss Rabbit made her appearance, all smiles and complaisance. On leaving the dining-room, Lord Sandford felt rather annoyed at seeing her established for the evening in the drawing-room : but so agreeable did she contrive to make herself, that he quite changed his opinion of her ; and when she left the room, he told his mother he had been quite mistaken about Miss Rabbit, for

that she was, undoubtedly, a very agreeable woman.

Elizabeth looked vexed ; which her mother perceiving said, " Oh, your sister will be sadly put out, if you also become fond of Miss Rabbit ; who is no friend of hers."

" Neither did I go so far, dear mother, as to say that I liked her ; though she is certainly a clever woman."

Night after night, when Lady Sandford became sleepy or tired, and, perhaps, we might add, a little cross, Miss Rabbit began to put forth her charms of conversation ; which were undoubtedly great. Sandford felt himself bewitched with her conversational powers ; and one day remarked to Elizabeth that they were fortunate in having so talented a person with them.

" We shall see," she coldly replied, " what Catherine thinks of her. Have you heard from her to-day ?" she continued, with her usual warmth.

" Yes ; not a day passes without my hearing she is well : and she says if she was here she should be quite happy. She has heard no more of that scoundrel Read ; so I suppose now he will leave her in peace. She has

met an agreeable old friend of her father's, Colonel Selwyn, whom she likes extremely: but now it is time to retire, so good-night, my sweet sister."

CHAPTER XVII.

BUT my readers will, perhaps, like to travel back with me to the day on which Catherine arrived at Claremont. It was her first visit there; and the comparative smallness of the house at first surprised her: but the beauty of the situation, the fineness of the trees, the air of perfect comfort and elegance throughout the whole place, delighted her much. That night, she of course saw nothing beyond the house. On entering the drawing-room, she was greatly pleased to see Colonel Selwyn standing near the window: they met as old friends, though Catherine could not divest herself from a feeling of embarrassment when she recalled to mind the last time they had met, and all that happened to her since. She fancied, from his manner, that not even a rumour of her engagement had reached him; for he inquired anxiously after all her

friends excepting Lord Sandford: but again she thought this might arise from delicacy. His manner towards her was so pointedly attentive for the next week, that she felt quite distressed. She wished not to give him pain, yet how was it to be avoided? She could not mention her engagement: that was out of the question. She wrote instantly to her mother, stating her distress, and that from his manner, she much feared Colonel Selwyn was becoming attached to her. This letter was despatched on the Monday, and on Tuesday morning, having been hitherto kept in the house by rain and cold weather, she determined to sally forth early, finding her Majesty did not then require her services. Her object was to see the beauty of those walks which were so much admired by all. On leaving the house she turned to the right, along a gravel pathway that led across the lawn towards a bank of the finest rhododendrons, azaleas and evergreens of every description; thence she proceeded up a most inviting green walk: the gleams of sunshine through the dark foliage of the hollies, and the beautiful neatness of this grass drive, with various others branching from it in all directions, charmed her. On

reaching the summit of a gentle slope, she was attracted to a small hot-house full of luxuriant exotics; but soon discovered that the fresh morning air was far pleasanter than the close, heated atmosphere of this conservatory. On turning round she was surprised to see, through a vista in the trees, what appeared to be a small temple, and immediately turned her steps towards it. It was a mausoleum erected to the memory of the lamented Princess Charlotte; whose early piety and melancholy fate had always interested Catherine; and now, standing on the very spot where the young princess had passed so many happy days, filled her mind with sad thoughts. But she roused herself from this reverie; and the sight of a bed of bright carnations again changed the current of her thoughts to more cheerful subjects; for it was Lord Sandford's favourite flower: his image was never long absent from her mind; and as she wandered on through numberless shady walks, she could not help expressing a hope that he might on some future day see them with her, and enter into all her delightful feelings. As she reached the top of the hill, she was much struck with the beauty of some magnificent

cedars ; thence looking down the broad green path, such a splendid scene opened to the view as is seldom to be met with in so small a domain. There were to be seen rhododendrons trailing along the ground under the dark shade of the sombre cedars ; and the banks of the little lake were covered with the silver-barked birch, whose slender branches waved in the gentle breeze. In the middle of the lake there was a small island ; which, from an association of ideas, reminded Catherine of Harden Hall. “ Oh, Harden Hall ! I would rather look upon thee and your pretty lake. Some few months must, however, elapse before this can take place.” She sat down on a grass bank close to the river, forgetful of all the beauties that surrounded her, and thinking only of “ dear Sandford.” “ But why should any gloomy forebodings trouble me ?” she exclaimed to herself. “ I am as sure of his affection and love as he is of mine.” So springing up, she pursued her walk under the beech trees which feathered down to the lake ; passing by the damp and unwholesome grotto, which looked a fit abode for toads and frogs : as she turned towards the house, an exclamation of surprise at the exquisite beauty of the view escaped from her lips.

The sun had been for some time behind a heavy mass of cloud ; but now it shone forth in all its glory, tinging the trees with golden hues. They were then arrayed in all their autumnal beauty ; the red beech hung its head gracefully towards an old cedar, which had braved many a tempest ; the birds were singing merrily, and the ever-changing hues on the water made the whole such a scene as painters would delight in.

As Catherine turned to the left, along another grass drive, intending to return to the house by the old cork trees, she espied Colonel Selwyn coming towards her. His manner of late had been more than usually attentive to her, and she began to dread what would follow. Her own feelings towards him were more like those of an affectionate niece towards an indulgent and kind uncle, than those of love and attachment. She would not appear to avoid him, so pursuing the same path as before, in a few minutes they met.

“ Is this not lovely, Miss Selby ? and did I say too much in its praise ? ”

“ No, indeed, Colonel Selwyn. I had no idea it was so beautiful, so perfect. ”

The exercise of walking and the fresh morn-

ing air had added greatly to Catherine's good looks, and a bright carnation hue tinged her cheek.

“Will Miss Selby give me the favour of one quarter of an hour's conversation with her?” Colouring still more, she bowed assent: he turned and joined her in her walk. An awkward silence ensued: she began to suspect what was coming, and already felt grieved and hurt at the idea of being obliged to inflict so much pain on one whom she really liked extremely, but—did not love. At length he broke silence by saying, he had long wished for this opportunity of speaking to Miss Selby, and of explaining the strong attachment he felt towards her. She could not but feel highly gratified when she heard him pour forth from his very soul love so pure and true as rarely falls to the lot of woman to inspire, or of man to express. He said she was his first, his only love. He offered to settle upon her everything he was possessed of; saying he knew how utterly unworthy he was of her regard, but that her happiness should be promoted by every means in his power; that if the greatest esteem, the greatest love, the—in short, he said, all that man could say, who

was desperately in love for the first time, at rather a mature age. Deeply did Catherine regret that she had ever taken that walk—deeply did she grieve to hear him make this declaration; for her kind and feeling heart was dreadfully shocked at the pain which her refusal would necessarily occasion him. She thanked him for the honour he had done her, and said how deeply she regretted the giving him pain; but, though she felt every esteem for him, she could not listen to his proposal.

“Oh, stop!” cried he; “stop! do not with one word annihilate hopes which have cheered me for nearly six months;” and he gazed on her with the profoundest love and respect stamped on his face.

She was greatly agitated: she scarcely knew what to say; till it struck her that to declare the real state of the case at once would be by far the most honourable proceeding. But then how could she do this?

He saw her hesitate; and standing before her, with difficulty mastering his emotion, he said, “Miss Selby, tell me, I entreat, whether you will consider of my offer, or whether I am to consider myself rejected for ever? Or, is it possible—God forbid!—that I have a rival?”

and he fixed his piercing eyes upon her, as if he would have read her very soul.

She perceived that his was true love indeed; but she felt that she loved another, and replied, "Colonel Selwyn, the affection I have for you is that of a niece devoted to her fondest uncle. I must tell you, without further disguise, that my affections are not mine to give. They are given to one who has known and loved me for some years."

"Years, Miss Selby!" exclaimed Colonel Selwyn, incredulously.

"Yes, indeed," she repeated, "for years; for he loved me and I him before either of us were aware of it. And now, Colonel Selwyn, I will tell you all, honestly and openly;" and she then told him of all her attachment to, and connection with, Lord Sandford: that they lived in hopes of being married the following year; and then she added the reasons of the delay. She ended, by saying, "Now, Colonel Selwyn, I have told you all about myself; and I hope, by so doing, have not lessened the regard which you once before expressed for me, and which I hope all my life to retain. You see now that my affections were not mine to give." She longed to add, that she had

much wished to give him to understand this before ; but she had not had courage.

“Far from lessening my regard—to call it by no softer name—Miss Selby, you have increased it tenfold. Would to God, I had known this sooner ! Yes, my happiness is gone—gone for ever ! But I blame you not, Catherine—for Catherine I must call you this once—I blame you not ; you have chosen one more suited to you in every respect. Yet I do blame myself, for having ever ventured to raise, in my own heart, hopes of a bliss too great for me in this world.”

Deeply was Catherine touched and affected by his frankness. “Colonel Selwyn,” she said, “I cannot but feel most highly flattered by your good opinion ; and now I beseech you, pray do not desert me,—or entirely give up all regard for me. I should be sadly disappointed, were I to lose a friend that I so highly value. Let us be for ever united by the bonds of the sincerest friendship ;” and she placed her arm within his, and looked so bewitchingly into his face, that he was well nigh driven to distraction at the thought that she could never be his.

“Yes, Catherine,” he replied, by a desperate

effort restraining his emotion ; “ yes, I will forget that you can never be so closely allied to me as my deep affection for you had warranted me in expecting. Farewell ;” and with hasty strides he turned towards the lake.

Scarcely less agitated or distressed, poor Catherine pursued her way to the house, and escaped, unseen, to her own apartment ; she threw herself into her chair, absorbed in deep thought. The last few months had turned the gay and thoughtless girl into a sensitive and feeling woman : the having thus wounded Colonel Selwyn’s best affections, and blighted his hopes, gave her the greatest uneasiness ; yet what could she have done ? As she contrasted his rather grave, though charming manner with the devotion of Lord Sandford, her smiles again returned ; she jumped up, exclaiming, “ No, I can never give up Sandford for the gallant colonel ;” and, with the scene still fresh on her memory, she resolved at once, as she never wished to conceal one thought of her heart from her own Sandford, to write him a minute account of the whole occurrence. It was this unreserved intercourse on all subjects that had so closely cemented these two young hearts together :

without it there can be nothing at all approaching to real affection. This very letter was what Lord Sandford mentioned to his sister Elizabeth as having received. In his answer, he spoke much of Miss Rabbit's charms, and of his own anxiety to see his beloved Catherine; who, if the truth be told, was looking forward with equal anxiety to the time when she should meet him again.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WHEN Lady Julia Read heard that the child was really ill, and not likely to live, she made herself quite easy on that subject. At least, she pretended to be so: but her pale, haggard look seemed to belie the assertion. Her eye shone with unnatural brilliancy.

“And now,” she said, turning round, and observing Howell, “there is no reason that Mr. Read should not marry: the register and certificate of marriage is destroyed, is it not?”

“It is,” said Howell, without changing colour; “and,” she continued, “where is Mr. Augustus Read? Why has he not been using the little interest he did possess to attract Miss Selby? Why does he leave her in the country, with young lordlings dangling at her feet all day and every day?”

Does he think that a fair lady is won without wooing?"

"You are right," replied Lady Julia, almost terrified at the vehemence with which this wretched woman urged her on; "you are right: but what can be done? Miss Selby not only refuses to see him, but has positively declined to receive any letters from him."

"Does she?" replied Howell, a horrid frown contracting her brow; "does she refuse him?—she shall rue the day she did so! Lady Julia, you have not instigated me to do that which has for ever blasted my name, to no purpose! No, by Heaven! I swear it: if it is only to make another as wretched as myself, that I repeat, Miss Selby shall marry Mr. Read!"

During this speech, Lady Julia sank down on the sofa, overcome with bitter thoughts: at the same time racking her brain to devise some means, if it were possible, of bringing about this desirable match. She feared Howell. She perceived the burning fever again attacking her intellects—for the wretched woman always knew when the fits of temporary insanity, to which she was so subject, were approaching—

she felt the room swimming round : when, suddenly jumping up, she seized Howell's arm with violence, saying, " I see her—I see her !" and a cold shudder came over her, and she remained motionless.

" You are a devil !" she said, speaking again with calmness, " and you will drive me mad."

" You seem so already," replied Howell, with a savage grin. " But listen to me," continued Howell, in a tone of authority,—and the usually haughty and imperious Lady Julia sat down once more ; " you owe me fifty pounds, and I shall not move hence till I receive them."

" Fifty pounds ! — fifty pounds ! — what for ?"

" For robbing the late Mrs. Read," replied Howell, with a ghastly smile.

" Wretch ! you know that I have not a penny to give you, and you ask me for fifty pounds !"

" Well, then, why do you promise what you cannot perform ? Why do you not get Miss Selby into your power ?—why do you not insist on Mr. Read marrying her within the month—if not with her will, why then against it ?"

"What!" said Lady Julia, as if this idea had never struck her till then, "how can that be done?" The paroxysm of insanity had passed away, and she was quite herself again. "And who is this young lordling who is fool enough to rival my nephew?"

"Fool, indeed!" retorted Howell, with a sneer of the utmost contempt; "why, it is a young boy of twenty—Lord Sandford is his name."

"Lord Sandford—Lord Sandford,—why, I never heard of him."

"Perhaps not, but that's his name. But now give me my fifty pounds, or remember, Lady Julia, I am a witness that can prove the ——"

"Prove! Woman, what do you mean?"

"Never mind. I speak no more:" and crossing her arms with dogged resolution, she sat perfectly silent. At length Lady Julia, after exhausting all the invectives she could think of against her, desired her to leave the room. She paid no attention, and sat as if she heard not. Her eyes were fixed and heavy: she appeared more dead than alive. Terrified to death, Lady Julia hastily approached her, but retreated when she encountered the dreadful

stare with which this woman eyed her. At last, seeing she was determined not to move without her demand being satisfied, she went to a drawer, and took out notes to that amount.

"Here," she said, "is your money, and let me never see your face again."

"Until you send for me," retorted Howell; "but take care, Lady Julia,—the time may come when you may be glad of my assistance. But, remember, unless I am more graciously received than upon this occasion, you will not obtain it." So saying, she proceeded towards the door: there she stopped for a few seconds, then, recollecting herself, said, "What is to be done with the child?"

Lady Julia started back. "Take it to the workhouse,—the Foundling Hospital,—anywhere," she added, "out of the way."

"Where?"

"Do you ask me where? Where all unfortunate children are disposed of. Take him anywhere. Do anything but mention him to me."

"I understand you," replied Howell, eyeing Lady Julia from head to foot; "I understand perfectly well: you wish to enjoy the fruits, and leave me to bear the blame. Very well.

Good-day ;” and without another word she left the room.

Lady Julia was conscious, from that moment, how necessary it was to keep this woman in good humour : she knew how much she was in her power, and was hourly becoming more convinced that Howell would not scruple at committing the most heinous crimes ; but when she turned round and saw an enormous pile of unpaid bills on the table, and reflected that Miss Selby was the only person whom she imagined could extricate her from her difficulty, she felt no compunction for what she had done : neither sorrow nor remorse. How to prevail on her nephew to renew his attentions to Miss Selby, she could not determine. She was perfectly aware that all the rebuffs he had received had cooled his ardour ; and she doubted whether it would be possible to make him renew his attentions. Besides, he had left town for the purpose of going abroad ; so that, altogether, her ladyship was, to use an homely phrase, “in a peck of troubles.” Her husband was, as too many husbands are, a perfect nonentity in all that concerned his wife. He knew nothing of her affairs—of her arrangements. As long as he enjoyed

his cigar and a good dinner in a handsome house, and was not worried by seeing his wife, (whom he heartily detested) he never troubled his head about anything else : excepting when his creditors became very clamorous, and then he was in general suddenly summoned out of town. All this did not make Lady Julia's an easy game to play. It appeared that she still laboured under the strange mistake of considering Miss Selby an heiress ; and not even her own father's positive denial of such being the case, had made the slightest alteration in her opinion : she still continued to be impressed with the idea that a large fortune had been left to her, and that she would inherit a large property when her old relations should be disposed of. But she was dreadfully annoyed and discomposed at Howell's news of Lord Sandford being always near her. She thought if he was an agreeable person there was but little doubt of Miss Selby's accepting him ; and she longed to know how they became acquainted, what sort of creature he was, and a thousand little etceteras, which she had no means of discovering. It suddenly occurred to her, that this was the month that Catherine would be in waiting, so

that no one could have access to her any more than Mr. Read—(our readers know rather better than this)—and she considered this as a fortunate circumstance. She thought it the very height of absurdity, and the most unpardonable insolence in a country girl, as she called Catherine, turning up her nose at Mr. Augustus Cosmo Read, nephew of the Right Honourable Lady Julia Read. She had no notion of such nonsense—such high and mighty airs. “I do declare she shall be married to him before another six months passes over our heads—that she shall. But that woman Howell,” said she, striking her forehead with her hand, “that woman will drive me mad: I cannot long survive the agony of this racking pain she has made me feel!”

Alas! those who sell themselves to work wickedness little know what a severe task-master they will henceforth have to serve; what complete slavery and bondage they will have to endure; what heart-burnings and repinings; what fears and suspicions; what wretchedness. It is only, perhaps, surpassed by those awful, unspeakable torments that will be the portion of the wicked hereafter.

But, gentle reader, let us not prejudge the end of this unhappy woman ; let us heartily pray that a way to salvation may be opened to her, and that she may not die, as too many live, in utter forgetfulness of the wise and merciful Giver of all good.

As Howell left the house, she chuckled within herself to think how completely she had subdued her haughty mistress ; how easily she could turn her round her thumb, and that for the future she was entirely in her power. But the child—this was what disturbed her peace. Fervently did she wish that she had left him to die in the flames. Dreadful thoughts, too horrid to express, took possession of her mind. She felt in her pocket for a knife, and thought whether that would be of any service in disposing of the child : but she herself shuddered, as she ran her fingers down the blade, and tried its edge. Rapidly she proceeded to the little inn, and desired a hackney-coach to wait till she was ready to start. The usual number of idle people filled the common room, but she pushed her way through and ran upstairs ; then, after feeling for some minutes for the key in her pocket,—which minutes from her impatience

appeared to be hours,—she unlocked the door; and, having closed it gently again, fastened it. The poor child was sleeping on the bed where she had left him that morning. Even in this den of iniquity the peaceful mind of the exhausted child had allowed him to sleep: he looked fearfully emaciated as he lay there in the broad daylight. His slumbers seemed broken by Howell's entrance, and in a few minutes he raised himself from his wretched pillow; a faint scream escaped from him as he perceived with whom he was, and he appeared bewildered by the strangeness of the scene that met his eyes. Howell approached him and endeavoured to speak soothingly to him; but though the words were honeyed, the voice still startled the child. At length she told him he must go out with her, that she was going to take him in a carriage; he resisted at first, but she spoke so decidedly that he gave way: she also insisted that he should be wrapped up in her cloak, and that she would carry him down stairs and place him in the coach. He passively submitted to all her directions, scarcely speaking; for young as he was, he felt that all that was passing around him was evil. Her pre-

parations were soon completed, and tying up her money, which amounted now to an hundred pounds, she opened the door and called the landlady. A dirty, slovenly, wobegone creature came up; Howell told her to bring the bill and ask some one to carry her luggage down stairs, as she was going to leave London. The woman stared very unceremoniously, and muttering something to herself about odd doings, descended to give the necessary orders. The bill was soon ready, and after settling it, Howell remained in the room till the box was fetched; she herself holding the boy in her arms. As she passed through the room, several coarse remarks were made, but they did not disturb her equanimity, and jumping into the hackney coach she told the coachman to drive to Manchester Square: why she went there she hardly knew, or what was the attraction, unless it was "that birds of a feather flock together."

CHAPTER XIX.

It was not till the middle of December that Lord Sandford and Miss Selby met: they had both felt their long separation very much; but if young men will fall in love so early in life, and go to college afterwards, they must take the consequences. Catherine had also been absent; but on the tenth she returned home, and two days afterwards, as she was sitting at work with her mother, she saw Lord Sandford riding towards the house; overjoyed at seeing him, she threw down her work and flew out to welcome him. He had not been expected at Harden Hall till the following day, so that it was a most agreeable surprise. Mrs. Selby received him with a warmth and cordiality of manner peculiar to herself. She was much attached to him, and with the single exception of his want of firmness of character, could not have wished

for a husband more suited to her daughter in every respect. He was in high spirits, and went on chattering away, to the great delight of Catherine, who also managed to have her full share in the conversation. He had arrived late the evening before at Harden Hall, and had started off immediately after breakfast.

"Well, and how is Miss Rabbit?" said Catherine, laughing.

"Oh, very well ; but why do you laugh?"

"Oh, I don't know ; only lately you have been so much taken up with the charms of the 'little Bunnie,' as you used to call her, that I thought it only right to inquire after her."

He said, "he had never fancied her before, but that now he found her a very agreeable, ladylike person."

"Elizabeth does not like her," said Catherine ; "and really, Sandford, I almost wonder you do, for she does flatter and 'toady' Lady Sandford in such a glaring manner."

"Ah ! that is what Elizabeth says. It is perhaps rather wicked of me, but when there is anything very particular that I wish my mother to do, I have only to ask Miss Rabbit to make the request—which she is sure

of doing with an immense deal of palaver and humbug about her ladyship and his lordship, and I don't know what else; for whatever she does she gets her end, and that is something: so you see I find her very useful." He then said "that his mother had sent a message to her to beg that she would go to Harden Hall the next day and pay a comfortable visit. Catherine looked her assent, and Mrs. Selby cheerfully gave hers, only putting in a proviso, that she must return for Christmas.

"Oh, that's a long way off, Mrs. Selby; but remember," he said, smiling archly; "she goes to meet her friend Elizabeth. Of course, I have nothing to do with the invitation."

He had only ridden over for two hours; but he remained certainly nearer four. The sun shining brightly, they were tempted to walk out to a rather distant cottage, which Catherine wished to visit. He said he would escort her there; and was not a little pleased to hear that it was at some distance. As they strolled along, they settled the alterations they would make at Harden Hall, after the next year was passed.

"My mother says we shall not be rich," he

continued ; “ but we shall have enough. We neither of us attach much importance to many things that to other people are indispensably necessary.”

Gently did Catherine insinuate that she cared but little for riches ; that if she had him, it was all she cared for : she was not ambitious of great wealth ; and, as their parents had given their consent, the want of money ought not now to be urged as any objection.

The old woman whom they went to visit, was now quite blind, and of the great age of eighty-five ; but so cheerful, and so resigned, it was a pleasure to visit her. Her little grandchild, of thirteen, kept the cottage so neat and tidy, that few could surpass it. It was thatched, and had been built by poor Nanny’s husband. Some ivy twined luxuriantly round the old chimney, and over the roof, which looked even more brilliant and dazzling than usual, from the dreariness of the country around. This building was the last in the small hamlet, about a mile and a half from the Rectory. The inhabitants were all miserably poor agricultural labourers, who worked for a small weekly pittance. Close by stood the workhouse, a great staring red brick

building, with windows enough to have cooled any house in India, and all generally open ; so that the Selbys called it the Temple of the Winds. A wall of seven feet enclosed the garden, effectually preventing the unfortunate inmates from seeing or being seen. But it was well calculated to answer the purpose for which it was intended : it was neither a prison, nor such a comfortable residence as to induce any to take up their abode there, who could maintain themselves comfortably out of it. If any one was really destitute, and in distress, the doors were open to them, and they were admitted. They had abundance of wholesome food ; and if sick, medicine and medical attendance were supplied ; and as soon as any one had the means of providing for himself by his work, out of the house, the doors were opened, and he might depart. Lord Sandford and Catherine agreed, that it would be a happiness to give these people plenty of work, so that they need not be obliged ever to go there.

As Catherine drew up the latch at old Nanny's cottage, a gentle voice inquired, "is that you, Miss Selby?—I thought I know'd your step."

"Yes, Nanny, it is."

"And who have you got with you, my dear?" she said, as she warmly pressed the hand of her kind friend.

"It is Lord Sandford, Nanny."

"Lord Sandford!" she exclaimed, and held out her hand to him. "Why, I remember your father—as kind a gentleman he was, my lord, as ever lived. Ah! I see how it is. Come to me, both of you," said the old woman. "To think that I should have lived to see—alas! not to see—the day that you two young creatures are to be made happy. May God bless you! May every happiness be yours, and the blessing of Heaven rest upon you!"

So unexpected was this blessing, that it quite upset both the lovers. Catherine's tears fell fast; and as Lord Sandford placed his arm so as to support her, most fervently did he implore every blessing on her, and vowed to devote the rest of his life to her.

"And now," continued Nanny, "sit down, my good, young lady; and tell me about Mrs. Selby and your grandmama; for it is a long time since I have seen you."

Catherine sat down on a ricketty stool, close to the old woman, and answered all her questions: she then produced a little basket of eatables for the old lady.

“ Lord Sandford brought this for you, Nanny,” said Catherine; “ he rode to the Rectory this morning, and walked on here with me.”

“ God bless him for it,” said the old woman, laying down her knitting. “ Ah ! sir, I remember your mother when she married : what a good young lady she was. Are you like her ? and your sister, what did you call her ?”

“ Elizabeth is the eldest,” replied Lord Sandford ; “ she is grown up very pretty. I think she resembles my father more than my mother ; she has very large dark eyes, and dark hair.”

“ Ay, ay, so had he, when I could see him ; and I never *seed* a more comely young gentleman than he was, never. Ay, sir, you will be as happy with Miss Selby as he was with my lady ; for she is so good, and never minds what the weather is, but trots about to see us all : even old helpless bodies like myself. She comes very often to see me ; she is so good, she taught me to knit ; she gives me eighteen-pence a week, and if it was not for that I never could keep out of the house. Oh ! Miss Selby, I love you, that I do.”

Catherine’s cheeks were suffused with burn-

ing blushes, at having her own praises thus published before Lord Sandford, and she rose up rather hastily, saying, she believed they must be going home, as her mother would be expecting her.

“ I hope I have not said anything to vex you, Miss ? ”

“ Oh, no, Nanny, you have not, indeed ; only you think too highly of me. Good-by, Nanny, you shall soon see me again ; ” and with her blessings on their heads the young pair left the little cottage. The cold seemed even more intense than it did when they left home ; but as they walked quickly they soon got warm, and reached home about three o’clock.

“ I fear I must order my horse.”

“ Oh ! not directly ; come in for a few minutes.”

“ Well, then,” said he to the servant, “ bring it round presently.”

On entering the sitting-room they found Mr. and Mrs. Selby.

“ Well, my dear children,” exclaimed Mr. Selby, as they approached him, “ you must, indeed, be cold, though I cannot say you look so. But, Lord Sandford, we must not detain

you any longer, as your mother will be jealous."

The horse being by this time announced as waiting at the door, Lord Sandford took his leave, having first obtained a promise from Mr. and Mrs. Selby that they would dine at Harden Hall the next day, and leave Catherine there till Christmas. As happy as possible he rode away, Catherine waving her hand to him from the window.

With a feeling, natural to little minds, Lady Sandford felt almost vexed at being under so much obligation to Mr. Selby. She knew, however, that without his assistance she could never by herself have managed her affairs ; and when she considered her situation dispassionately, she could not but acknowledge what great kindness he had shown toward her and her fatherless children : still at times, the not being able to manage everything for herself, and the being under the necessity of consulting Mr. Selby on all subjects very much annoyed her. He never volunteered the least advice, unless he thought it his actual duty to do so ; she was, therefore, obliged to ask it. It was through his means that the property had been brought round ; so that although, on

account of the numerous charges on it which her son had to pay, he could never be very rich, yet still he would have enough to be comfortable. Lady Sandford received all the Selby family the next evening with great cordiality, particularly Catherine, whom she had not seen for some months, and was much struck with the improvement in her appearance. Ever since her illness she had looked pale and delicate; but the last few months had produced a great change, and she now appeared uncommonly well, and overjoyed to see Elizabeth. The trio sat together the whole evening, talking or listening to each other's music; for Lord Sandford professed himself to be fond of it. During the evening he accidentally mentioned Mr. Hawkins of Cambridge, his particular friend. Catherine remembered that it was a person of that name he had before found fault with, and she exclaimed, "Why, I thought you did not like him, on account of his peculiar notions; and I remember perfectly well your abusing him the last time you were staying at Torrington."

"Very true," replied Lord Sandford, "I did abuse him, because I disliked him: or rather

I disliked what I had heard of him, for I did not know him personally; but since that I have made his acquaintance I like him very much. He is very gentlemanlike and agreeable; but, certainly, his opinions on religious subjects are rather too severe, too refined, too—too much like the Papists,” he said, colouring as he spoke, “ever to become general.”

Catherine looked grieved; she had lately heard much of these new lights, and had a great horror of Sandford's becoming infected. She knew that from a child he had had a very religious cast, and she justly dreaded such a man as Hawkins. But quickly banishing such a thought from her mind, she merely said she had little doubt but that he would sober down in a few years, and then see how far he had deviated from the true and right way. The carriage soon came for Mr. and Mrs. Selby to return home. Though grieved to see them depart on their long drive alone, Catherine knew it would be of no use to offer to return with them, and that she should be most thoroughly happy at Harden Hall. Lady Sandford said everything that was kind and affectionate, and Miss Rabbit said she could only echo what her ladyship had said. Cathe-

rine met Elizabeth's expressive look at this announcement, but neither Lord Sandford nor his mother seemed to remark it as anything extraordinary. Miss Rabbit's manner to Catherine had always been most kind, yet she never felt quite safe with her; she felt a kind of restraint in her presence which was foreign to her, and which annoyed her extremely: Elizabeth also felt the same. The days passed quickly away, and the evenings were devoted to music and reading; for now James had returned home he did not much care for reading, and thought it very dull work being obliged to listen to Scott's *Lady of the Lake*, or *Marmion*, or Byron's *Bride of Abydos*. He had no turn for reading, and was excessively fond of music. Lady Sandford delighted in reading: books were "meat and drink" to her, and she was not fond of music; her pursuits, therefore, coincided with those of her eldest son, which was an additional reason with her for preferring the eldest to the second, whom she certainly treated with great neglect. The poor fellow felt this conduct extremely, and was therefore very grateful to Catherine for indulging his taste for music; and Sandford was pleased to observe how ready she was in

every possible way to oblige all her future brothers and sisters.

The day for Catherine's return now arrived, much to the regret of all the party in the house; excepting perhaps Miss Rabbit, who, though she pretended great affection for Miss Selby, was certainly not over much pleased at her influence with Lord Sandford, as it entirely thwarted any influence she might have gained. To every one else her departure was a matter of unfeigned regret. The boys and girls all clustered round her, saying, she must live with them for ever; for they loved her better than anyone in the world. She herself could scarcely restrain her tears, she was so sorry to leave them; though they were to meet the next day; for Lady Sandford had promised that a carriage full should spend the following day at the Rectory. As she wished Elizabeth good-bye, and kissed her, she whispered, "Remember, dearest, more animation—more life." Elizabeth smiled through her tears at her sweet, young friend; and, escorted by the two brothers to the carriage, she started on her solitary drive home.

CHAPTER XX.

DECEMBER and January are generally the gayest months in the country; and both the Sandfords and Selbys had been looking forward with much pleasure to some balls, which then annually took place. We have before said, that the neighbourhood round Torrington was much scattered; these winter balls were the only things that drew people together; and then all the houses were filled, which made it very pleasant. Arthur had obtained leave to pass his Christmas at home; and one ball being on the twenty-ninth of December, he was to be present at it. Catherine danced beautifully, and was exceedingly fond of it; and the ball was eagerly looked forward to. In the morning Lord Sandford rode over with a magnificent bouquet he had ordered from town for Catherine, and some red and white camelias for her hair. She was particularly

pleased with this little attention on his part, and proudly placed them in her hair that evening, in preference to a little bunch of white roses that she had intended to wear. Lord Sandford had engaged her for the first two sets of quadrilles. He did not waltz, unfortunately; and at Mrs. Selby's suggestion, they agreed that they would not dance more than two quadrilles together; as there were so many people with whom Lord Sandford ought to dance, that it would raise quite a feeling against him, if all his attentions were entirely given up to Catherine. The whole evening, their good sense convinced them that Mrs. Selby was right; though their compliance was much against their own wishes, for they would have liked to have danced every dance together. The room was large and well lighted, and Weippert himself graced the orchestra. What could the dancers wish for more? The camelias looked certainly most becoming; and as Catherine opened the ball with Lord Sandford, not a few people whispered, that that young pair looked so well, and so happy together, that *something must come of it*. We have already said that Lord Sandford was not reckoned handsome generally; but Catherine

thought otherwise when his large dark eyes were turned upon her with the deepest love and admiration expressed in them. She was happy—if we may be allowed the expression, exquisitely happy. She was dancing with the man she loved best in the world; the music was perfect, and the scene so gay and enlivening, that she could scarcely contain her happiness. Her whole thoughts were centered in Lord Sandford, and as Elizabeth's partner remarked to her, "Miss Selby looks so radiant with delight, that it is quite a pleasure to look at her!" Lord Sandford himself was not less happy. The quadrille over, Catherine returned to her mother; but scarcely had she reached her when she was asked to waltz. Lord Sandford remained standing, talking to her mother—talking of that blooming girl whose graceful movements round the room attracted universal admiration: her fine figure appeared to the greatest advantage; and Lord Sandford expressed his deep regrets that he had never learned to waltz. The moment the dance was over, she returned to her mother, and Lord Sandford gave her his arm for the next quadrille. Many a friend inquired of Mrs. Selby if they might offer her their con-

gratulations; her reply was always, that she most willingly accepted them, for her daughter was to be married the following year.

Nothing could have passed off better than this ball. Catherine heard people talking of going away long before she thought it possible that the time could have arrived. She had been dancing with a whole "HERD" of people, to use Arthur's expression, whom he thought were not fit to dance with her; and Lord Sandford had been performing the same duty with his acquaintances. He then joined Catherine, saying, "Mrs. Selby will, I am sure, wait while we have one more dance;" she smiled her assent, and they went off.

It was Susan's first public ball, and she enjoyed it immensely: she was much prettier than her sister, but not equal to her either in figure or manner. Catherine's great beauty was her looking so high-bred—so *distingué*. This quadrille finished the ball, and in a perfect flutter of happiness, Lord Sandford handed his future bride to the carriage, saying that he should ride over the next morning and see if they were all alive.

"Do not come very early then," said Catherine, "for we shall not be up: wish Elizabeth

good-night for me, for I have not seen her for some time. How nicely she looked! Come to-morrow. Good-night ;” and she sprang into the carriage after her mother, with a step as light as if she had undergone no fatigue, instead of having danced four hours incessantly.

The first thing that met Catherine’s eye the next morning was a nosegay on the table, and a note ; but great was her disappointment to find that it was to acquaint her that Lord Sandford was obliged to defer his visit ; for in getting out of the carriage the evening before, he had sprained his ankle, and was, therefore, obliged to keep himself quiet. This was a great disappointment to both parties, for they had fully made up their minds to “ have the ball over again,” by talking it over and discussing all the little nothings that happened to each. Lord Sandford assured her that nothing should have kept him a prisoner could he possibly have left the house ; but the carriage horses were declared by the old coachman, at her ladyship’s suggestion, *too tired* to go as far as Torrington to-day, and he was quite unable to mount his horse. Elizabeth also wrote a note, saying how much

they had enjoyed the ball; to which Lady Sandford added the most flattering postscript about the pleasure it had given her the preceding evening to see her so well and happy, and that her personal appearance was not reckoned among the least of her charms. All this was very flattering, very agreeable, very charming; yet Catherine truly said in her note, that she would willingly have exchanged all this for one hour's conversation with Lord Sandford. The following day, her father regretted that it was impossible to offer her the carriage, and Catherine was obliged to remain satisfied at home; and so she amused herself with relating everything connected with the ball, to her brothers and sisters, and made them laugh very much at her descriptions of all the odd figures that were there.

One need not be surprised if she did not remain quite quiet. Perhaps we should forgive her if she looked out of the window fifty times that day, and wondered if Lord Sandford were better.

This accident, which at first had the appearance of being trifling, soon proved to be a most serious affair: the pain increased very much, and the leg swelled to such a degree,

that the following morning Lady Sandford became seriously alarmed; so that when Catherine and her father arrived, expecting to find him walking about, they found he was entirely confined to his room. The doctors prescribed perfect rest and quiet, and hoped that in about a week he would be able to leave the sofa. Catherine stood quite aghast, as Miss Rabbit, with no slight feeling of pleasure at wounding one whom she felt stood in the way of all her schemes, gave her this account. Elizabeth was with her brother for more than half an hour, so Catherine had to sit down and to endure all Miss Rabbit's remarks: for it was now quite a matter of endurance. She had never liked Miss Rabbit; but from that hour positively disliked her.

After waiting what appeared to Catherine an interminable time, Lady Sandford made her appearance, saying, that the surgeon already pronounced him better, but had forbidden him to use his foot; so as he was not permitted to go down stairs, he begged Catherine would take the trouble of coming up stairs to him: nothing short of this would satisfy him. "But be most careful not to agitate him. I shall leave you alone, my love," said her ladyship; "he wishes it."

With anxious and hurried steps Catherine followed her ladyship to Lord Sandford's room; but when the door of his sitting-room was opened, and she saw him stretched on the sofa perfectly pallid, her composure nearly forsook her. But she remembered that perhaps his life depended on her keeping herself perfectly calm: she spoke to him, the tears glistening in her eyes, and yet she was tolerably composed. Lady Sandford left them alone. And, oh! often afterwards did Catherine declare to her mother, that though the happiness she felt at the ball was of a more buoyant nature, yet the time that she looked back upon as really the happiest, was that when she was allowed to sit and watch him, whom she idolized. She nursed him with such gentleness, that when Elizabeth came to inform her that her father was waiting, it was suggested whether it might not be arranged for her to remain, not only that afternoon, but for some days.

"Ah! but poor Arthur," interrupted Catherine, as Lord Sandford gave his directions to his sister to dispatch a servant for whatever she might require.

"Nonsense! Arthur must let me have you

for two days," said Sandford; "I feel so satisfied, that I never shall recover if you do not remain here. Pray do not leave me;" and he pressed her so earnestly that Elizabeth insisted on her staying where she was, or else he would worry himself to such a degree that he would probably suffer from it.

This was a decisive reason; and Catherine soon received a message from her father, saying he only waited to wish her good-bye, and that he willingly consented to the arrangement, particularly as the snow had come on again, and he was in an open carriage.

From that time Lord Sandford began to improve so rapidly, that James declared that his illness was all sham; that he had only pretended to be so ill that he might get Catherine to nurse him. She expressed her admiration of his apartment, a small but well-furnished room. This sitting-room, indeed, looked thoroughly comfortable, with a quantity of books, which the family had collected, to amuse the invalid; and this certainly looked much more inviting than a long cold drive in an open carriage, through the snow. Her poor father, however, must encounter these

hardships ; but, in fact, he thought nothing of them. He always said, that as long as his children were happy, he cared for nothing else : that was all he lived for ; and, certainly, day and night he laboured to promote their welfare. If ever, in the course of their conversation, or, indeed, upon any occasion whatever, any of them were tempted to say a harsh or hasty word, it was forgiven almost before it was uttered ; for the look of sorrow, at such an occurrence, in his mild eye, was enough to melt a heart of stone.

On that day Sandford took an opportunity of descanting upon Mr. Selby's excellent qualities. He said how much he was indebted to him for the affection and care he had always shewn him ; for the kind interest he had displayed in managing his affairs ; and, to crown all, for allowing him to look forward to the time when he might claim his Catherine as his bride. Never before that day had they discussed their future life ; but during that day and the following, as he lay on the sofa, unable to move, they settled many plans and arranged various schemes, bright and hopeful as the first beams of a summer sun. He then informed Catherine that he had been much

struck by the advantages of many practices and alterations in the service of the Church, called Puseyism ; and expressed his fondness for the daily service, and for some other things, that were to him quite new. She reminded him that these were not novelties ; that those services had once been general, but were now only in constant use in cathedral churches and colleges ; and with respect to old customs that had been revived, these had been given up for many years, because it was found that the people generally were unable to observe them, and they had therefore become obsolete ; but now it seems to be desired by many people that they should be restored.

“ This is the case,” rejoined Lord Sandford ; “ indeed, many are the alterations that I should be glad to see introduced ; but we will not discuss these points now. I am expecting my friend, Mr. Hawkins, to pay me a visit ; and as he is clever, and has paid particular attention to these subjects, I mean to ask his advice about restoring the windows of the chapel.” He reminded Catherine, that she once objected to all the windows being glazed with coloured glass.

“ Yes,” she said, “ she still did so.”

He replied, "I will leave that point to be settled by Hawkins;" and added, "I hope before long to have the chapel completed, and ready for a chaplain; when service shall be regularly performed there."

Catherine could not perhaps have given him a satisfactory reason; but she never fancied Mr. Hawkins: she did not like the dictatorial manner he assumed towards every one—probably, because he thought himself of superior sanctity. But she was too kind-hearted and just, to form a harsh judgment of any one, without knowing them intimately; so she merely told Lord Sandford, that she must always approve of what he liked; and hoped that he would soon be able to leave the house, and superintend the alterations of the chapel himself, as it was her first wish also to have the daily service.

Lord Sandford's leg was so far recovered by the day that Catherine was to return, that he determined to drive her home himself. It was in vain that his mother urged him not to attempt it: he was bent on doing so; but consented to take the close carriage, as it was so much better for Catherine. He was wretched at the idea of being separated from

her; but was not sufficiently recovered to accept Mrs. Selby's offer of going to the Rectory. However, the weather proved so unpropitious for the invalid, that it was quite impossible for him to venture out, which was most fortunate; for when the doctor arrived, he decided at once that it was absolutely necessary that he should remain perfectly quiet a day or two longer, before he could be allowed to leave the house.

"And go to the ball next week? Ah, doctor, you must let me go," said Lord Sandford; "I want to go there so very much."

The kind-hearted old man smiled, and replied, that if he would only remain perfectly quiet three or four days longer, he had not the slightest doubt but that he would be capable of dancing by the following Friday; but if he attempted to walk a step now, he very probably might not be able to dance for months.

This was very vexatious; three days more close confinement to a sofa for a youth under twenty was a very irksome affair: and notwithstanding the anxiety his kind friends who nursed him showed to relieve the tediousness of it, he felt that it was a sad restraint; but

the natural sweetness of his disposition prevented him from showing any impatience, or vexing his kind mother and sisters. He contrived to keep Catherine in ignorance of his being confined to the sofa, as he knew she would not be allowed to return to Harden Hall; merely stating, in the tenderest *billets-doux*, that he was unable to leave the house.

Nothing can be more wearing to the patience than a sprain; and Lord Sandford found it so: but all evils have an end; and by the following Wednesday he was able to walk and run, as he himself said, as well as the best of them. He had not seen Catherine for a whole week; and after his long confinement he felt most delighted when Friday arrived. He danced about the house, singing snatches of quadrilles and waltzes; to the great amusement of both James and Elizabeth, who certainly held his musical powers very cheap. He had ordered a quantity of lilies of the valley from town for Catherine; and he could think of nothing but how well she would look. His sister was also dressed in white, with her hair adorned with the same flowers. The day seemed to Sandford interminably long: he thought dinner

would never arrive, and when it did come, that it never would be over: the servants seemed more slow and stupid than ever; and then Lady Sandford was rather put out about something, no one knew very clearly what: but it is not unusual for people, when they have everything they can wish for or desire, to make great mountains out of mole-hills; and this was the case with her ladyship. Her maid had been suffering from a headache (which, *en passant*, a lady's maid never should have), so that she had been obliged to retire to rest; and the under maid her ladyship felt sure had not curled her wig becomingly: so fully was she impressed with this idea, that she appealed to her sons whether it was so or not, who both laughed heartily, and assured her it was capital—just the same as usual—and then they laughed again.

“Now, I will not have you laugh at me,” said her ladyship, “I will not;” and putting her hand to her mouth, and giving a little affected laugh, “it is very rude, and I am not at all pleased.”

But the old lady might have spared herself the trouble of talking, for they all three had

gone off into fits of laughter. Lord Sandford was the first to recover himself, and to reply,—

“I really beg your pardon, dear mother; but I could not have helped laughing if it had been to save my life;” and it was some time before the young party could recover their composure.

It never seemed to occur to their mother that her daughter was much more to be pitied than herself; for the illness of her maid deprived her of all assistance but what she received from Miss Rabbit, who had been most kind in attending to her toilette. But, after all, no one has that peculiar knack of putting on things comfortably and becomingly like one's own maid.

The time drew on for their setting off. Lady Sandford declared if they started at nine it would be quite soon enough; Lord Sandford said that a quarter before nine ought to be the latest, or they would miss the first dance, and he appealed to Miss Rabbit, to know what she thought. Oh, she agreed with his lordship that nine was rather late.

“Well, then, go earlier,” said his mother. “I am only going to please you young people.”

“Oh, oh!” thought Elizabeth, “there are few people enjoy a ball more than my respected mother. Why, she told us the other day, that she had always so much attention paid her, that she quite forgot she had a daughter to look after; and then, if she gets into conversation with Mr. Melville, or any agreeable people, we shall soon discover whether she likes a ball or not.”

All this passed through Elizabeth’s head in one quarter of the time it has taken me to write it, or you to read it. The moment the carriage was announced, they all jumped gaily in, and off they went on their long expedition. Full five minutes did they wait in the cloak room before the Selby family arrived: it might have been a few minutes more; but to Lord Sandford it appeared almost an hour. The moment they made their appearance, he rushed up to Catherine, totally regardless of the many meaning glances that passed between the other parties in the room. Their joy at meeting was equal; and though he still looked pale, yet Catherine could not help feeling pleased at the improvement that had taken place since she had taken her leave of him the week before. At that

time, from his long confinement, he was looking truly miserable; and it was evident that he was not a little pulled down. This ball was, if possible, more agreeable than the last; there were many more gentlemen than ladies—an arrangement which always insures a good ball: at least to the latter, who are thus able to pick and choose their partners; but as every rose has its thorn, so to every enjoyment there is some drawback. It happened that twice Lord Sandford came to solicit Catherine to dance, when she was engaged. He was rather hurt at this; but when she said, in her sweetest manner, “Let us dance the one after this,” his smile returned, and he immediately petitioned—not only “*for the one after,*” but for every other quadrille during the evening; “and in the mean time I will sit down.” Just at that moment, Catherine caught a glimpse of two rather nice looking girls, at the further end of the room, whom she had observed as having danced but very little. Ascertaining that his sprained ankle did not suffer from the exertion, she requested him to stand up with one of those sisters. He looked rather rebellious at first; but when she urged it, as being a real charity,

his good nature prevailed, and off he went. After this piece of duty, he gave himself up entirely to the pleasure of dancing with Catherine. He soon saw no one else: he soon thought of none but her. She looked radiant with delight: the white lilies contrasted beautifully with her dark hair, which was simply braided off her face. Many were their regrets that this was to be the last ball of the season, and they even discussed the possibility of getting up a third; but after a while they agreed that these two had been so good, and so well attended, that it would be a thousand pities to risk the failure of a third. The Miss Stanleys were there—three or four of them: Miss Stanley was very much devoted to an old baronet—rather reversing the order of things; for it seemed that she was trying to woo him, not he trying to win her: since the happy man she had made up her mind to marry had not yet made his appearance, and she still remained Miss Stanley.

“Ah!” Lord Sandford observed, with great gravity, “how jealous she will be of you, because you will have married at twenty, and she at twenty-nine has not yet succeeded in catching any one.”

“How I hate that expression of ‘catching

any one!’” replied Catherine; “yet there is no other that expresses exactly what one means. Poor Miss Stanley! it would really be a blessing to herself and the neighbourhood, to marry her to some one or other.”

“Well,” replied Lord Sandford, “she seems to be trying hard this evening to catch old Sir James Everett. But do look at the old goose; how pleased he looks at her flattery! See, she is evidently admiring the shape of his foot, for he has stuck it out in a very conspicuous manner. Poor girl! I really do pity her; for I do not think she will succeed even with that old beau. You have no idea, Catherine, how much we hold in horror and detestation a woman whose sole object in life is to be married, and to have a home of her own, perfectly indifferent as to what sort of a creature the husband may be, and totally regardless of his character. I think it is quite horrid!”

Most cordially and completely did Catherine enter into all that he said: for it had often filled her with disgust, to observe the manoeuvres which mothers and daughters too often resort to for the purpose of catching eligible men! That mothers, who have been bringing up their children with the greatest

care, should be in such a prodigious hurry to marry them off and lose them seems quite incomprehensible: and as Lord Sandford went on talking in this strain about match-making *mamas*, he little thought what one year would bring forth. But we must not anticipate the *finale* of our tale. So deeply and pleasantly had they been engaged in conversation, that the last set of quadrilles was begun and ended before they thought it was half over. Every hour they spent together they became more attached to each other. That decision and firmness of character which Lord Sandford sometimes required was imparted to him by Catherine, and his virtues were in like manner imparted to her. Quickly now did the happy throng of young and merry faces separate and disperse; some returned home pleased and satisfied, some very happy, some with hearts of care, and others light as air. One young girl's heart—the only one which we are allowed to scan—was indeed all happiness, and one there was who re-echoed its every throb. She felt this as she laid her head that night on her pillow, and sank to deep repose, full of gratitude to the great Giver of all good, for all the happiness He had showered upon her.

CHAPTER XXI.

A SHORT time after these balls, Lord Sandford told Catherine he had heard from his friend Hawkins, who proposed to pay him a visit the following week, and that he hoped she would persuade her father and mother to dine at Harden Hall, and meet him. Catherine promised to do so, but could not help expressing her surprise at Sandford being so very intimate with a person who, till quite lately, he had thought half crazy and very unsound in his religious opinions. He said that a more intimate acquaintance with him had caused this change in his opinion of Hawkins, who he was very glad was coming, for the prospect of his visit had given Miss Rabbit so much delight: she had passed a great deal of her time at Cambridge, and wished to have an account of all the alterations and improvements that had taken place; and, more-

over, she had already heard of this Mr. Hawkins, knew his character tolerably well, and fancied she should like him.

“ Ah ! that would do very well,” replied Catherine, laughing ; “ I think we had better promote that. This is the first of your friends that I have ever seen, dear Sandford ; and I trust he is only the precursor of many more : since all your friends are mine, even before I see them.”

He thanked her for her goodness, and, after sundry other matters had been discussed, he rode home, saying, as he left the door, “ That his pony ought to know the way tolerably well ; for if it had been that road twice, it had been a thousand times at least.”

Mr. and Mrs. Selby were out with Arthur, and the rest of the family were dispersed about the house, so that Catherine had been alone with Lord Sandford. It was new year’s day : they had been talking over the important events which this year was to bring forth ; they both felt very sanguine as to the result, and only wished that the next six months had passed away, for there was every probability that at the end of this year they would be united for ever—indissolubly united.

Catherine blushed as she heard his repeated assurances of love and attachment ; of love that nothing could alter or divert from its present channel : he again affectionately pressed her hand, whilst he repeated it was the particular wish of his mother that he should explain to Catherine, that at first they would not be very rich ; for the payment of the immense jointure to his mother, and the fortunes of his younger brothers and sisters, would be a heavy charge on his property : but they would still have enough to live upon very comfortably—about fifteen hundred a year.

“ Ample, indeed !” exclaimed Catherine.
“ Why, I want nothing.”

“ Yes, Catherine, you do,” replied Sandford ;
“ and you shall, as my wife, have everything that you have been accustomed to as Miss Selby : your father would never allow the marriage to take place, if all that had not been previously arranged ; but we shall have ample for that. Ah, these tedious months at college ! In another fortnight I must leave you and return to Cambridge, and I shall not have the happiness of seeing you for ages. I cannot bear the idea of leaving you, dear Catherine, only for five minutes.”

The regret was, indeed, mutual; and the last half hour of their interview was embittered by the anticipation that they should be so soon separated. Twice had he risen and walked to the door, and twice had he returned to speak the last fond word—to breathe the last fond thought,—when the increasing darkness, and a thought of the long dismal ride forced him to tear himself away. She remained standing—her eyes fixed on the fire: she was lost in thought, — thoughts strangely blended with hopes and fears. She never, for one instant, doubted Sandford's affection; but she liked not Miss Rabbit's influence, nor Mr. Hawkins's arrival. She had never much admired Miss Rabbit; and all she heard from Elizabeth of her toadying and flattering Lady Sandford and her son—of her cleverly contriving always to appear to give up her opinion to others, but always succeeding in having her own way at last—had certainly not added much to her affection for the lady in question. Fortunately for her, before she had time to work herself up into a state of excitement, a well-known step was heard approaching the door, and Arthur entered the room.

“What, alone, dearest sister! I did not

expect to find you alone;" and he gently kissed her soft cheek.

She explained, that Lord Sandford had only left her two minutes before, to ride back to Harden Hall; and she very much feared he had stayed too late, as it was getting so dark.

"Oh! plenty of light for riding," said Arthur. "Never fear for Sandford; he will ride a good pace on that capital little pony; and to tell you the truth, fair sister, I am not sorry he is gone: he monopolizes you too much. I shall get quite jealous," he continued, as he sat himself down by her side. She jumped up, made a cheerful blaze, drew the curtain, to shut out the cold and dismal view; and, drawing her chair close to Arthur, they rested their feet on the fender, and were soon deeply immersed in a most interesting conversation.

Catherine had always been her brother's *confidante*: she knew every trait of his fine manly character; which, united to the sweetest disposition, made him worthy of a sister's love. He had entered the army very early; but so well had Mr. Selby formed his character, that he escaped all those vicious habits which are so often contracted by young men when first

entering the world. He had been a good deal abroad with his regiment; and, being older than Catherine, she looked up to him for advice; and he turned to her for sympathy in all his difficulties. His pleasures he always shared with her. Catherine had been quite correct in her surmises that it would be soon too dark for riding; and before Lord Sandford reached home, it became completely so. The snow began to descend heavily; but knowing how sure-footed and safe his pony was, he gave her her head, and she picked her way cleverly along the road. The cold was intense: however, he mentally resolved that when he rode to the Rectory the next day, he would take his night-gear with him, and accept Mrs. Selby's offer of a night's lodging; for this ride was anything but comfortable or agreeable. But the thought of the light, gay creature he had just parted from, who was so devoted to him in every thought and word, cheered him on his lonely way; and after a tedious ride, he arrived at the lodge gate. The snow had ceased, and setting spurs to his horse, he soon found shelter in his own house again.

His mother had been very anxiously look-

ing for him, and Miss Rabbit did not fail to keep her ladyship's impatience for his return alive; throwing out hints that she thought Miss Selby might really have been a little more considerate, and not have detained him so long."

"I suppose you think, then," said Elizabeth, "that after a certain time, Catherine is to become tired of him and ought to tell him to go: that would be rather reversing the order of things. I suppose you cannot remember the time when you were in love. Ah! Miss Rabbit, probably things have changed since then: was it the custom in your day for the favoured swain to leave when he pleased, or for his bride elect to give him his *congé*?"

Miss Rabbit laughed and smirked by turns at this speech (it was but an awkward attempt), and certainly it did not ingratiate her more in Elizabeth's favour; but before this combat of words could be carried any further, Lord Sandford himself walked in, exclaiming, he was quite safe, but nearly frozen to death.

"Well, then, run to your own room directly, or you will spoil this new carpet;" said her

ladyship. There, I see the muddy snow dropping from your feet. Oh, my poor carpet!"

Elizabeth was so shocked at this reception of one who, a few minutes before, his mother had been so anxiously expecting, that she jumped up from her work, and running to her brother, gave him a kiss, saying, "How glad she was he had arrived, and hoped Catherine was well;" and speaking kindly and fondly to him, lighted a candle and went with him up stairs. He was not insensible to her attentions—few brothers are so; and certainly the contrast of his mother's welcome and what he had met with at the Rectory, increased his longing to be there. But Elizabeth's great sweetness of manner always smoothed matters; and he knew full well that his mother loved him better than anything in the world: perhaps with the two exceptions of herself and her money. After hearing from Elizabeth how matters stood in the drawing-room and where James was, she left him, and begged he would change his wet clothes immediately and come to dinner: "I shall not go down till I hear your step on the stairs; for if I do, mama will think you late, but if we go down together,

she will vote you very punctual, for she considers that I am like clock-work." He again kissed his affectionate sister, who left him with a blazing fire, just as he was beginning, for the hundredth time, to expatiate to her upon Catherine's charms.

How fortunate it is that all the world are not in love at the same time, so that there are some listeners left; for it seldom or never seems to strike such as are under its influence, that those they honour with their strict confidence may perhaps get almost tired of hearing, day after day, these praises repeated. Not so with Elizabeth: her affection for Catherine was that of the tenderest sister; from children they had loved one another; being of the same age, they had the same pursuits and amusements; and as far back as Elizabeth could remember anything, she had pictured to herself how delightful it would be for Sandford to marry Catherine. It had always been her brightest dream; and now that this marriage was on the point of being realized, she felt fonder than ever of her future sister. Far from entertaining any little feeling of jealousy, at soon becoming of less importance to her brother than she now was, she daily

saw with increasing delight his fondness and devotion to Catherine. One person, indeed, she very much wished had never entered the house, and that was Miss Rabbit; who she even persuaded herself was actually aspiring to be Countess of Sandford: indeed she felt convinced of it. The innumerable little inuendoes which her mother never saw or heeded, her obsequiousness to Lord Sandford, her flattering tone when she wished to gain any point; all these things were noted by Elizabeth, and in after years clearly indicated that she had showed more penetration than those around her. That evening Miss Rabbit's manner had been so dictatorial to her mother, that she determined to speak to her brother Sandford about it. Miss Rabbit had taken advantage of his absence to obtain completely the upper hand over her ladyship; who scarcely dared to say her soul was her own, if not permitted by the governess. The servants all detested Miss Rabbit; and they are very often not at all bad judges of the characters of those above them: in this case they certainly were not; and the nurse, who had lived with them many years, said she boded no good, where Miss Rabbit had a finger in the pie. Her smooth-tongued

flattery suited Lady Sandford very well; but Elizabeth's honest heart rebelled against it.

Lord Sandford was not long in making his appearance, and as they descended the stairs Elizabeth poured into his ear all her complaints against Miss Rabbit. She complained, and most justly, that Miss Rabbit's aim was to make their mother entirely dependent upon her; that she had been making herself very agreeable and very useful to her ladyship; and that the next step in all probability would be, that she would take the entire direction of the household affairs out of her mother's hands. Her brother was up in arms immediately, and agreed perfectly with his sister; that it was high time something should be done; but how to set about it he did not exactly know, for he had a great feeling of delicacy about interfering in the slightest degree with any of his mother's arrangements: when he came of age all would be his, and it was his daily study not to make his little brothers feel so. Yet still his sister was not to be annoyed in this way: but merely begging her not to make any further observations on the subject that evening, they entered the drawing-room just as the good-

natured old butler, who had waited till he knew his lordship was ready, announced the dinner.

At the sight of Lord Sandford all her ladyship's smiles and good-humour returned, and the dinner passed off pleasantly. But in the evening, when he mentioned his intention of again going to the Rectory, and of accepting Mrs. Selby's offer of a bed, at least for one night, her ladyship's naturally rather long face became considerably lengthened, and he foresaw a storm. At this moment, however, a sweet voice was heard singing, and immediately all other sounds were hushed; for Elizabeth, who had foreseen what was coming, flew to the pianoforte, and began singing her mother's favourite air; when that was finished she sang another, and so on, till tea arrived, so that Lady Sandford could not find time to thwart her son's wishes and projects: he said he was going there to breakfast, but would return to dinner the following day.

The one who felt these separations most, but said the least, was Elizabeth; for, from what she experienced at these short absences of her brother, she knew how dull and sad her home would be when he was really married. She was not aware till afterwards, that

the house with the estate became his property as soon as he was of age, and that consequently the whole family would have to relinquish it. She had often heard her mother say, that even after his marriage she hoped they would all live together ; but of course that must depend upon circumstances. Although Elizabeth was ignorant of this, Miss Rabbit was not, and ever since her introduction into the family her great ambition had been to gain the affections of Lord Sandford herself (being about thirty years his senior, and the daughter of a confectioner in London) ; or if she could not by any possible means bring this about, she hoped by some means or other to contrive that he should marry some very young girl, who would be elated at the idea of becoming a countess, and so inexperienced as to require constant advice, and to feel the necessity of having a constant companion with her, and that companion to be herself. But when she saw Miss Selby, she was convinced that she should never be able to accomplish this project. People can very quickly discover when others dislike them ; and Miss Rabbit herself, though she could not help feeling kindly towards Miss Selby, soon became convinced that she was no

favourite of hers. From that hour her determination was taken, that she would do all that lay in her power to prevent the match from taking place. Any one but Miss Rabbit would have given up the attempt long before this evening; but she was one of those persevering people, who measure their merits by the difficulties they overcome to obtain their ends, and she was quite determined that nothing she could do should be left undone, to prevent Catherine from becoming the wife of Lord Sandford. She loved him herself: yes, strange to say, she loved him deeply; but it was with that jealous feeling which women of a certain age are very apt to experience when in love with men much younger than themselves. She could not bear that any one, scarcely his mother, should regard him with affection; and from the necessity of concealing her feelings, and of appearing only *decently* fond of him, her unrequited love burned with such intensity, that in her ill-regulated mind she could scarcely suppress its outward manifestation. If Lord Sandford could have imagined such a thing possible, he would have been annoyed and disgusted in the extreme.

CHAPTER XXII.

WHEN Lord Sandford first announced that he expected Mr. Hawkins would shortly pay him a visit, Miss Rabbit immediately began to speculate upon the advantages she might derive from his assistance. She had already gleaned from his lordship that Mr. Hawkins was a great Puseyite, and had a very high opinion of his own abilities, but notwithstanding he had a very great regard for him ; and Miss Rabbit determined so to play her cards as to make him useful in furthering her projects. She suddenly became very fond of church architecture, and talked very learnedly about placing the font near the entrance, and the pulpit north and south ; open sittings obtained great praise, while pews were declared to be the greatest disgrace to any place of public worship.

It is quite astonishing how fast these opi-

nions have gained ground: they are very bewitching to the young; who fancy that the discussing these subjects gives them great importance, and that it puts them on a par with those whose profession it is to regulate these matters. The boy or girl of seventeen now think themselves quite as capable of judging whether a man is fit for the ministry or not—in short whether he is what he ought to be—as any bishop in the land.

For some time Lord Sandford had evidently shown a slight leaning towards these opinions; so that when Mr. Hawkins made his appearance at Harden Hall he found the ground already prepared for the very seed he wished to sow. The day after his arrival, the Selbys drove over, and Catherine was introduced to Mr. Hawkins; who seemed rather surprised at the great intimacy between her and Lord Sandford. Catherine was certainly not prepossessed in his favour: his appearance was very much against him; he was rather below the average height—about five feet four—excessively thin and lanky, with long, slender arms, that might have belonged, judging from their length, to a man of six feet. His face also was thin and drawn out; the contour

rather "*pretty*," for the nose was fine and well shaped : but what caused such a disagreeable impression on first sight, were his eyes ; which were of a dull grey, so deeply set and so close to the nose, that without actually producing a squint, they had a very sinister look. Catherine had always felt an impression that she should not like this little man, and on seeing him her dislike was confirmed. Then, again, he was dressed so oddly : his waistcoat, of black silk, was quite tight up to his throat ; his neckcloth, of the coarsest linen (by-the-by, not the cleanest, some people think there is virtue in dirt), was not tied, but arranged differently from any Catherine had ever seen. But his eyes were what particularly surprised her : they were the eyes of a serpent, cold and cunning. She went through the form of being introduced to him, saying she was always glad to make acquaintance with any of Lord Sandford's friends ; then having drawn Lord Sandford to one side of the room, she entered into conversation with him. But this did not at all suit the views of Mr. Hawkins, who, with the most provoking pertinacity, followed them, and looking from the window, made some remark about the beauty of the scenery ; and

then he proceeded, without hesitation, to various subjects. He discussed Lord Sandford's going, and his staying: told how all their Cantab friends were getting on, and this with an animation and vivacity that quite astonished Catherine; who in spite of herself was amused and interested. Lord Sandford appeared lost in delight: he seemed to regard his friend as a demi-god, before whom he must not give way to too much tenderness of manner towards Catherine. Mr. Hawkins saw the advantage he had gained over the fair lady, and then with a peculiar smile, in which good-humour and sarcasm were blended, turned away, saying, "That he was afraid he must be intruding," and left the room.

In answer to Lord Sandford's inquiries as to what she thought of him, how she liked him, &c., Catherine's answer was, "That her first impression had been a disagreeable one; but that during the last half hour's conversation he had shown himself possessed of great conversational powers."

"Do not commit yourself, my dear Catherine, by praising him too much," said Sandford, laughing; "don't be too partial."

During a most interesting conversation of

nearly two hours, Mr. Hawkins was entirely forgotten; when suddenly he entered the room, saying the rain had quite ceased, and that he must go to see the chapel: that he was quite shocked at being nearly four-and-twenty hours in the house without having seen the place of worship, which he knew was so contiguous to the Hall. He was leaving the room, when Catherine exclaimed:

“Now, Sandford, why should we not accompany Mr. Hawkins? I am quite equipped for walking, and should enjoy it very much.”

Lord Sandford looked so completely his satisfaction as she said this, that Catherine was amply repaid for any little sacrifice of personal convenience she might make; and the trio set out immediately.

We have already described the situation of the chapel as very picturesque, very romantic; and as they walked towards it, Lord Sandford and his fair companion drew many comparisons between the cold, bleak, and dreary aspect that the park at the present time presented, and that which had so delighted them the day of the pic-nic on the water. Mr. Hawkins studied them both very attentively, and in that one walk fancied he could foresee

that if Lord Sandford were ever united to Catherine, all the little influence he possessed would have to succumb to hers. He admired her extremely: he admired that decision of character, tempered with such perfect gentleness and sound judgment, — which he was quite aware was the one thing wanted in Lord Sandford's character. Yet this admiration of her good qualities did not shield her from his selfishness: like some others, he required that every thought, and every person, should be sacrificed to one great master—himself. He talked very agreeably on many points; but Catherine remarked, that on whatever subject he was discoursing, he strove to hook in something connected with his own peculiar ideas and views. She was not particularly pleased with his manner, and yet she was obliged to acknowledge to herself that he was very entertaining. Several times, as they walked along, while talking gaily to Lord Sandford, she perceived that his eyes were fixed upon her with a very disagreeable expression; striving, as it were, to read her every thought

As they approached the chapel, Lord Sandford pointed out to Mr. Hawkins in what a

dilapidated condition it was in, and what alterations he had projected by-and-by, besides the necessary repairs, adding, "it must undergo much beautifying before it will be fit to be re-opened." Mr. Hawkins highly approved of these plans, and was not backward in recommending some alterations which could not be effected but at a very great expense, but which he considered as indispensably necessary; such, for instance, as that all the windows should be glazed with stained glass. Miss Selby ventured to say that she had lately visited a church where this was the case; and that the effect was not pleasing, for it made the church very dark,—besides, the expense would be enormous. Mr. Hawkins turned up his eyes with feigned astonishment, saying, "Well, Miss Selby, I should never have supposed that *you* could have considered that any decorations of a place," he added, with great solemnity, "intended for the worship of the Almighty, could be too costly."

"No, no more I do, if we have the means of paying," replied Catherine; "but I do say, we had better at first begin moderately; for it is always easy to make any alterations in the

windows afterwards :” but what she especially desired was to see the chapel fitted up in the interior, and ready for divine service.

“ Do you have a private chaplain ?” resumed Mr. Hawkins, with an eye to his own position.

“ I intend to have one,” was all the reply he got. Lord Sandford listened with the greatest attention to what Catherine said ; whispering to her as she concluded, “ *Vous avez raison comme toujours,*” yet still he seemed inclined to coincide with Mr. Hawkins.

They continued walking, till the clock striking four, reminded Catherine that her father was to leave Harden Hall at that time ; and, accordingly, they bent their steps towards the house ; though several times they stopped to look at different vistas through the leafless trees,—so beautiful was the undulation of the park scenery, that it was lovely even seen in frost and snow. Catherine, in some respects, felt rather surprised at the extreme intimacy there appeared to exist between Lord Sandford and Mr. Hawkins ; but when she remembered that they were fellow collegians, it no longer astonished her. As they approached the house, they saw the little

phaeton at the door, and Mr. Selby, whip in hand, waiting for them ; so, quickening their pace, they soon joined the party who were waiting to see them off.

“Truants again,” exclaimed Mr. Selby. “I am afraid I must carry you away, or else we shall be late.”

The last words were spoken, but not one half was said that was intended—*vix illud potui dicere triste vale* ; and amidst the kissing of hands and waving of handkerchiefs, the little pony trotted off. Lord Sandford could not tear himself away from the door till he had watched the carriage ascending a steep hill opposite the house ; and when it had nearly reached the top, he was able to distinguish Catherine still waving her handkerchief. “God bless you !” said he, with fervour. He thought he had been alone ; but turning round, he saw Mr. Hawkins standing a few yards off, which rather discomposed him. His eyes were fixed on Lord Sandford, but on perceiving that he was observed, he turned and walked leisurely away.

Often, very often, did Sandford regret that clause in his father’s will which prohibited him from marrying before he had attained his

majority; for he was most fully persuaded that he could never feel an attachment for any other than Catherine: this certainly was in accordance with his present feelings.

That evening, as the two gentlemen were sitting together after dinner, Mr. Hawkins began by asking Lord Sandford "if he had any recollection of a Mr. Read, who had the reputation of having been rather wild at Cambridge," and went on to say, "that he had heard his name mentioned in an awkward story as connected with Miss Selby."

"Stop," said Sandford; "could that have
_____"

"Of that I know nothing," interrupted his companion: "excepting that the day was fixed for the wedding, and the *trousseau* bought; when, for no earthly reason that any one could ever find out, the young lady changed her mind, and would have nothing to say to him. His enemies concocted an extravagant history of his being already married, of his wife being then alive, and Heaven knows what besides, so that the fair lady was quite free from all blame. Being connected with a rich and influential family, the affair was hushed up; and it happened soon

afterwards that Miss Selby became maid of honour to her Majesty."

"Are you aware what you are saying?" exclaimed Lord Sandford, starting from his chair, with cheeks scarlet with indignation—"do you know, Hawkins, that you are libelling the character of one whose pure and open heart has this day been listening to you? By Heaven! I could myself—but no," he continued, and calmed himself; "your odious calumnies shall not affect me thus. We had better part, for the present: we shall meet to-morrow."

Hawkins began to mutter a meek apology, and entreated Lord Sandford would kindly consider how impossible it was that he, a perfect stranger, who had never seen Miss Selby before, could imagine that the lady he had heard spoken of at clubs (a convulsive twitch in Lord Sandford's face did not escape the quick eye of his tormentor), as not being particularly amiable, or in any respect very agreeable, could possibly have been the charming, amiable Miss Selby that had so delighted him that day."

Kind-hearted and unsuspecting to a fault, Lord Sandford received this apology; merely

making the request that Mr. Hawkins would never mention this report to a living soul, but that the next day he himself would learn every particular. Hawkins, however, did not allow him to leave the room till he had artfully thrown out many hints and insinuations, which could not fail to excite disagreeable sensations in the mind of Lord Sandford. He saw, indeed, that an impression had been made, and he felt that it would not be easy to lull these suspicions to rest: particularly as they were all founded on seeming facts.

It was with much coldness that Sandford wished his *soi-disant* friend good-night that evening: he could not forget the pain, whether intentional or unintentional, that had been given him; and he determined to ride to the Rectory the first thing the following day, and ascertain whether his Catherine had ever known Mr. Read or not. A little tinge of jealousy, that plague of man's life, mingled with his other feelings: though, in justice to him, it must be said that this thought was banished almost before it had time to fix its sting. The morning was favourable to his early ride, and the fresh cool air revived him after his sleepless night; and when he reached

the Rectory, on running into the garden to ascertain if Catherine's window was open, he saw that she was employing herself in making a sketch: she looked so pure, so fresh, so good, that a deep feeling of the wrong he had done her by one moment's suspicion, humbled him much in his own eyes. A joyful exclamation escaped her lips as she perceived him approaching, and throwing aside the drawing-book she flew downstairs to greet him: but as he came towards her she was struck by his looking pale, ill, and worn.

"What has happened, Sandford? what has happened?" she exclaimed; "you look distressed."

"May I come in with you?" he gently answered, holding her hand. Gladly she led him to the drawing-room—which was ready prepared, even at the early hour of eight, to receive any one—and as they sat down together on the sofa, Catherine entreated he would tell her what it was that had so distressed him: for she was really frightened. He, on his part, scarcely knew what to say; till, after several times clearing his throat, and trying to begin, he said, "Mr. Read"—and fixed his eyes on Catherine.

“ Mr. Read !” she exclaimed ; “ why he is not here, surely ?”

He let her hand drop, saying, “ Why should Miss Selby be so anxious to avoid meeting a gentleman who must, or at least ought to be, nothing to her.”

“ Dearest Sandford, what do you mean ? For God’s sake, tell me. You are driving me distracted ! What have you heard ? Tell me, I conjure you, if you have any love for me.”

Thus conjured he explained himself, and told her all that Mr. Hawkins had said. Her indignation against the vile informant knew no bounds ; and she declared that nothing should ever induce her to speak to him again. She then related to Lord Sandford all that had occurred to her in connexion with Mr. Read : how he had pestered her ; how he had belied her ; how these paragraphs had appeared in the paper, no one knowing who put them in ; how she had received his letters, and returned them unopened—in fact every single thing that she could remember : expressing in the strongest terms her abhorrence and dislike to the man, and hoping now that he would really leave her in peace ;

adding, that perhaps Sandford might remember that she began telling him all this history one day, when they were interrupted, and other and more interesting subjects had put it altogether out of her head. She was the more hurt at Mr. Hawkins being the person to revive disagreeable recollections, because she from the first had felt a repugnance to him; and it was only as a matter of duty, and because he was her Sandford's great friend, that she had partly overcome this dislike. And now he returned her kindness by telling—or rather inventing—false and calumnious stories; and had even felt a satisfaction in communicating them to one whose affection and good opinion she was most anxious to preserve, and whose every thought had been fixed on her so long.

Lord Sandford too felt deeply grieved. He saw how much pain he had caused his Catherine, and the idea that he should ever have given way to anything the least like an injurious suspicion towards her, humbled him to the dust. He bowed, and declared that he would never have any communication with Mr. Hawkins: that he would never see him again. He was angry with himself for having ever listened to him; but his good angel Catherine

interposed, and gently suggested whether he might not have mistaken his friend—whether it was possible that he could have spoken without any malicious intention of injuring her: and, indeed, said much to the same purpose. After a little more conversation, they went to breakfast; agreeing that it was far better never again to mention this subject. The fineness of the morning was deemed by all the family quite an excuse (if any was needed), for this early visit.

Each day that the lovers met added to their regret that they must so soon part; for Sandford was obliged shortly to return to college: it was only for a few weeks, as this was his last term; yet still the thoughts of parting from each other was painful to a degree. In vain they both strove to repress any exhibition of great feeling: Catherine's tears would burst forth; and when the last day of his stay arrived, she felt as if some dreadful calamity was hanging over her. The sun had not shone once that morning; and, though not commonly superstitious, she never failed to remember what her old nurse had told her when a child, "that the sun not shining on a parting guest boded no

good." But Sandford's affection and attention seemed to increase tenfold; he dwelt with the fondest interest on every trifling incident that had occurred: he depicted their future happiness in the new world that would beam on them both when he attained his majority, with all the vivid colouring of twenty; and Catherine's anticipations were not the less brilliant. Arthur was to return to celebrate Sandford's coming of age, and the still more important event of his sister's marriage. Nevertheless, the dreaded moment would come: the carriage wheels were heard before half the last words had been spoken—before half Sandford's injunctions had been given that his treasure would take every care of herself—would write daily to him. Still he lingered; he leant over the sofa: one of her white hands clasped within his own: they were alone; and in that moment of heartfelt sorrow at parting from each other, the most scrupulous may forgive his imprinting a kiss of deep and fervent love on her pale brow. It spoke more than words could express: it was a pledge of unalterable love—of fond and increasing affection. Again he wrung her hand;

again she conjured him to write that evening, or, at latest, the next day.

A soft step was heard, and Mrs. Selby appeared; gently saying, she grieved to hurry him away, but that Sandford certainly ought not any longer to delay his departure.

“God bless you!” he said, in a voice stifled with emotion, and rushed out of the room. Wildly did Catherine follow him, and waved her handkerchief from the window as he passed. He was *gone*! How much sorrow has this little word of four letters caused! and how blest in after life did Catherine feel that she had not known what that separation boded to her!

He was gone; and the music and the work which the day before had appeared so bright and pretty, now had lost their charms. The excitement was over: she longed for something to call her from home, to be actively engaged to drown thought; for she could not sufficiently compose herself to engage in her usual occupations. Her mother saw this, and by way of rousing her to some exertion, reminded her of a sick neighbour who expected a visit, at the further end of the village;

and in an hour afterwards this amiable girl might have been seen rapidly walking towards this abode of wretchedness, with a well-stored basket. The fresh air had already invigorated her, and revived her spirits.

CHAPTER XXIII.

WRITING to each other was a daily occupation to both Sandford and his bride elect: not a single day passed over without a line, however short it might be; and when Catherine daily received the most affectionate letters from Sandford, she felt that the receipt of these letters, filled with such firm assurances of his affection, were more than a compensation for the pain the separation had occasioned.

The winter was unusually severe and cold. During the first week in February, Catherine heard nothing of or from Sandford. Such unusual silence frightened her very much. She knew not what could have caused it; but she was convinced that nothing but inability to write, from illness, would have kept his pen idle for seven whole days. The thought of his being ill at college, away from herself and his family, greatly depressed her.

His mother and sister were at the sea-side, so that there must be some delay before she could expect to hear about him through them. She therefore, immediately wrote even more urgent entreaties to Lord Sandford, to beg that if he was unable to write himself, he would at least employ some one to do so; for that she was nearly worn out by her anxiety. She wrote this letter on the Thursday, and calculated that she would receive an answer on the Saturday: sooner than that it was impossible to do so. Never had the days appeared so long; and rising at break of day on Saturday, she put on her bonnet, determined to go herself and see whether there was any letter. When she reached the post-office, a sickening feeling of despair came over her: she feared she knew not what. On she went, and the kind old woman at the post-office, who had known her from a child, evidently perceiving that something was the matter, put a letter into her trembling hands. It was from himself, written very badly, to say that a severe attack of fever was the reason of his not having written; only that he was beginning to recover, but could not endure the idea that any one else should

write to her; that he had been insensible for three days, and the doctors said it might be months before he quite recovered. A shower of tears fell from Catherine's eyes as she read this note, and rushing into her own room, she fell on her knees and fervently prayed that he might be spared—that he might be restored to her in his former health. When tolerably composed she joined the party, who were most anxious to hear what account Sandford had given of himself. One thing struck Catherine as rather singular, that he had not mentioned one word about her letters till the last page; when he simply thanked her for being so good as to write so often. There was nothing in the words exactly to excite any other than kind emotions; yet still, she knew not why, she felt there was something different from usual. But then, he was too ill, as he said himself, to write often or well; and she pressed the dear letter to her heart, too thankful at having received assurances of his welfare.

The next morning brought intelligence from Lady Sandford of her son's illness, and of her great anxiety and alarm for him; and saying, that had it not been for the unremitted

attention he had received from Mr. Hawkins, who had nursed him as a brother, he would never have survived his illness. Catherine's astonishment at hearing this was certainly very great; for Lord Sandford had left her with the determination of never being again intimate with Mr. Hawkins, whom she most thoroughly disliked. But angry with herself for feeling this, she wrote instantly to Lord Sandford, telling him what she had heard from his mother; at the same time expressing her surprise: although she must acknowledge how much she felt indebted to Mr. Hawkins for his nursing Sandford so kindly, and only regretted that she was debarred from doing so herself. Her thoughts flowed on in the most affectionate and tender manner, and she trusted that in a few days his good account of himself would be confirmed. Her heart was lighter; for she also received the kindest letters from Lord Sandford's mother and sister begging her not to be over anxious, as all real danger was passed. Elizabeth had written repeatedly since Lord Sandford's return to college; each letter more full than the preceding one, of the great affection she bore to Catherine.

Four more days passed away, and again no letter ; but the fifth morning brought one that, by the date, should have arrived much sooner. It announced his perfect recovery, owing entirely to Mr. Hawkins's kind and unremitting attentions. He spoke with unbounded gratitude of his friend's kindness, and added, "I think Hawkins must be our first guest." This letter was affectionate, but perhaps not so much so as those that had preceded it; and though Catherine felt inclined to be angry with herself for the bare suspicion, it certainly did cross her mind that such an opportunity would not be lost by this man to ingratiate himself with Lord Sandford. She had heard much of the spirit of proselytism that animates these *soi disant* new lights, and she was well aware that Sandford had a decided leaning that way. Again, however, she repelled the thought as unworthy of her. Besides, she reasoned with herself, what harm can Mr. Hawkins wish me? none, for I can do him none. In this, however, she was mistaken. But our readers will probably feel anxious to be informed of what had occurred since our hero returned to Cambridge.

On his return to college, he at first rigidly

adhered to his resolution of avoiding Mr. Hawkins, and never of associating with him again. This conduct greatly nettled that dangerous little man; who guessed rightly in supposing that Miss Selby had been the innocent cause of his losing a "tuft" for his friend, and not unlikely at some future time a living. Henceforth bitter hatred seized him, and he resolved to watch for an opportunity of marring her happiness. But this was no easy task; till one day he heard Lord Sandford had been taken seriously ill, and immediately determined to wait upon him. He accordingly composed his sharp disagreeable features into an expression of the deepest concern. Lord Sandford's illness was declared infectious, and he was left alone. Mr. Hawkins desired the servant not to mention his name, for that he only came as a friend to nurse Lord Sandford during his illness; and he immediately took up his position in the sick room. His patient was delirious, but he bore with it all, nursed him affectionately—yes, affectionately; for he had a sincere regard for him, though he had the greatest aversion to Miss Selby. For several days Sandford remained insensible, and then a slight change for the better was apparent: a soft sleep came over

him, and the doctors declared all danger was past. On coming to himself the first thing he asked for was some cold water, which was quietly offered to him by an unknown hand; and all his wants he found supplied in the same gentle way. Towards the afternoon, when a little more light was allowed to enter the room, he saw Hawkins sitting near the bed, tenderly watching him. Astonishment prevented his speaking; he would quite as soon have expected to see the great Mogul. He felt bewildered: he scarcely could credit the evidence of his senses. His head seemed again failing him, and he felt it to be so. The effect that the appearance of Mr. Hawkins had made on his patient did not escape his quick eye; who sat watching him intensely, as if to fascinate him in the same way as some species of snakes are said to allure their prey: and possibly physiognomists might have traced in his features some resemblance likewise. But knowing how pernicious anything like excitement must necessarily be for an invalid scarcely rescued from the jaws of death, he gently approached his bedside, and in that soft insinuating manner, which he knew full well how to assume, spoke to Sandford of his

illness, his danger, and of his having been nursed by him: giving him to understand, that if it had not been for his friend's watchfulness and unremitting care he never could have recovered.

Lord Sandford's surprise was great: but a thought struck him that this conduct must have been had recourse to, to forward some views of his own; and that Hawkins could never have voluntarily shut himself up in the sick room of one from whom he had been lately so much estranged, without some ultimate design. However, when he saw him kneeling by the side of the bed, and heard him offer up a fervent aspiration for his future welfare, his kind heart was touched; he held forth his pale, emaciated hand to grasp that of his companion, and by so doing expressed more than a volume of words. Hawkins saw his point was gained: but he had tact enough not to press him too hard at first; so telling Lord Sandford that the physician had forbidden him to talk, and had enjoined the most perfect quiet, he handed him a large packet of letters, and retired to the next room. Such great consideration and kindness could not fail to make a favourable impression on Sandford, who had always been particularly susceptible to kindly

emotions. Most of these letters were from Miss Selby; he eagerly devoured their contents, strongly reproaching himself for not having asked some one at the beginning of his illness to write to Catherine, and tell her the reason of his not doing so himself. He pictured to himself the agony she must have endured, and sitting up in bed determined to write to her that instant. On his ringing the bell. Hawkins entered to inquire what he wanted. He smiled as he answered, and said he wanted to write a letter. His new friend opposed his doing so, on the ground that the exertion would be too much for him; but seeing that Sandford was determined, and that the slightest contradiction in his enfeebled state would only agitate him unnecessarily, he brought all the necessary implements, and sat down near the bed with a book in his hand.

We have elsewhere said that the letter was not so long as usual, and that Catherine had fetched it herself from the post. When Mr. Hawkins saw the address, he silently determined that few more letters should pass in that quarter, if he could prevent it.

Lord Sandford began to recover rapidly,

and the best advice, joined to a vigorous and unbroken constitution, enabled him to rally much more quickly than is usually the case. He felt deeply indebted to his friend ; became passionately fond of him ; and never was seen without him. Hawkins had obtained, in consequence, such unlimited influence over him, that he was consulted by Sandford on every subject ; and he took an opportunity of again bringing before him, in their most fascinating colours, the new Puseyite doctrines, and talked much of the want of church reform, particularly of a reform in the lives of the clergy ; and was continually inquiring what Sandford intended to do in the chapel at Harden Hall—whether he had settled any plans. On hearing that Mr. Selby was his adviser on all religious subjects, Mr. Hawkins looked thunderstruck. “That one,” he exclaimed, “who has been seen at theatres and balls, and has even shot with a bow and arrow ; who has actually ridden to see the hounds throw off—that, that—— but I beg your pardon, my dear Sandford,” he continued, softening his tone and laying his arm on his shoulder ; “forgive me, if I have pained you ; for at the moment I forgot that you were to be ultimately connected with Mr.

Selby. But oh ! pardon me, my good friend, I must speak out : do not marry into a family that is not good and pious, that does not abound in good works. Your fair lady-love is certainly the most charming and engaging person I ever saw ; but is she formed to make you happy ? Forgive me, if I have said too much."

"I cannot forgive you, Hawkins;" replied Lord Sandford, deeply wounded. "I have taken you to my bosom, and the first thing you do is to abuse, without a particle of truth, the people you know I am devoted to. Is this your friendship for me?" and he fixed his full, large eyes on Hawkins ; who sank abashed under their influence. "I must beg," continued Sandford, "that this subject is not again mentioned. My love and regard for you is great ; but I have one far stronger. Perhaps you have never felt what it is to have every thought and feeling devoted to one who is the essence of all goodness."

Mr. Hawkins ran away, stopping his ears. "Oh, cease, I beseech you ! let me not hear from your lips such blasphemy. I know that young men generally use these kind of expressions towards their *promessi sposi* ; but I

will speak the truth, though it may offend you. I always thought you were of a more religious turn. That devotion of which you speak, should be given alone to God."

He pronounced these words slowly and solemnly; and they were not without effect on Lord Sandford. It was the first time such an idea had crossed his mind, that in his love of Catherine there could be anything sinful. However, this conversation had made a deep impression upon him: he shut himself up that day, denied himself to all visitors, and was most thoroughly wretched. But he never for one moment allowed that there was anything wrong in this devotion; on the contrary, he knew that such love was sanctified by scripture. But why should Hawkins be so bitter against it? he knew not. He heartily wished he had married Catherine, even at the risk of disobeying his father's will. He loved her to desperation; and instantly sat down and wrote her a most affectionate letter: he blushed to think that four days had passed without his writing to her; he begged her forgiveness, made various excuses, and ended by saying, that his being weak and poorly made him long for her charming society more than ever.

Catherine's delight was very great when she received this welcome letter: she had longed for another, as the last had been so short; yet she could not blame him, for her father truly said that after such an illness it was often difficult to fix the attention on any particular subject. And she was too thankful for his recovery to criticise the style of writing. Mr. Hawkins had not been once mentioned in the letter; and she began to hope the extreme intimacy was wearing off. She fancied his own aggrandisement and benefit was the object he had in view, and that the happiness and interest of Lord Sandford were quite secondary. But why was he so odious to her? She knew not herself. She wrote daily: but her letters were not always answered; and sometimes when they were, the most affectionate sentences were broken off, some cold words substituted, and excuses made that his time was so completely occupied with reading that he had none to spare for writing, as formerly: that he was studying the old fathers and ancient divinity with Mr. Hawkins, but that his affection for her remained unaltered; and that he hoped in April to meet her, never again to be separated.

She felt this neglect more keenly than she allowed. When any one blamed him, she was his champion, and always took his part. But she began to look pale and ill : sleep deserted her. Thus passed the whole of February. The last letter she had received was dated the seventeenth ; it was short, and full of excuses for not having written earlier : but at the end of the letter there were sentences which cancelled all those that had been written before ; although they declared his deep and earnest love. He spoke of Hawkins as his greatest friend ; who never left him ; and of its being his fixed intention to make him his chaplain as soon as he came of age : that he was just going to be ordained, and, Hawkins being so greatly his superior, that he allowed him the direction of all his affairs.

“Deplorable weakness !” exclaimed Catherine ; “what have I done or left undone, that you, Sandford, should write thus ?” continued she through her tears. “Oh God, have mercy on me ! Let him not break my heart, nor ruin his own happiness.” She spoke out passionately, though alone. Her thoughts found relief in utterance ; and, falling on her knees, she prayed for him. She wrote to him again

and again. Day after day did she anxiously look for the post (which, however, brought no letter from Sandford), with such intense misery and anguish as can scarcely be imagined. She felt that her whole life, her whole happiness depended upon hearing from him. She doubted not but that Mr. Hawkins had fabricated some stories about her, on purpose to prevent her retaining that ascendancy over Sandford which from having more decision of character, she had naturally enough acquired.

The first ten days of March had passed, and no letter came. Mr. Selby even wrote to his ward to demand some explanation for such extraordinary conduct, but received no letter in return. Catherine's pale cheek showed how much she suffered from this cruel neglect: but she complained not, excepting to her mother, on whose bosom she poured out all her grief.

Gentle reader,—if ever you have had your love requited for months by one you deemed perfect, and then have found his love for you has ceased, you will have felt that deep desolation which woman only can feel. Coldness will then have come over your brightest

dreams ; and then—and not till then—will you have found that your affection was unworthily bestowed, and your love cast away ; and that him for whom you could have sacrificed everything, even life itself, was unworthy of your love. Then, and then only, can you comprehend what were Catherine's feelings during this her first month of trial. Nor was Lord Sandford without his trials : he loved Catherine as man only loves once. Yet such is the difference between the affection of man and woman.

The daily efforts of Mr. Hawkins were partly successful ; so far that, by one excuse and another,—by drawing him into society, into study, *et cetera*,—he effectually prevented him from writing to Torrington for a week. Never did Lord Sandford, however, lay his head to rest without praying for that beloved being whom he was at the same time so deeply injuring. Yet still he had not sufficient strength of mind to resume his daily correspondence, and brave the ridicule of Hawkins, who never left him, and whom he knew despised such weakness. Hawkins had, although his senior only by a few years, obtained a most extraordinary ascendancy over Lord

Sandford; who feared him,—he feared his cold, sneering remarks. One day, Sandford happening to take one of Catherine's letters from his pocket, Mr. Hawkins caught a sight of the address (for nothing ever escaped his quick eye), and said, "I congratulate you on having escaped from Miss Selby's importunities, and from the slavery you imposed on yourself of writing to her every day. Oh, believe me, Sandford, she is not calculated to make you happy: she is, indeed—what shall I call it?—too giddy—too fond of universal admiration; too fond of frivolous amusement—of dancing. Have you never observed how anxious she is to obtain every one's applause? I am satisfied she would never suit you: feel sure of that, and take my advice—forget her."

"Forget her?—Never!" exclaimed Lord Sandford.

"Well, she certainly will think you have done so, for it is now nearly a fortnight since you have written to her; and you may feel quite sure that she is ceasing to think so constantly of you, and is becoming, by degrees, reconciled to your silence."

If Lord Sandford had allowed the good feelings that were then struggling in his

breast, to have the ascendancy, he must have remembered that that morning's post had brought such a letter as none but an angel could have written; but it was his misfortune through life, that the one who spoke last always carried conviction; and though most amiable and loveable in most respects, he nevertheless, at this critical moment—which was decisive of his after life—allowed one, whom he secretly feared, to decry her whom he had known for years as a pattern of excellence,—one who was his affianced bride, and who had yet to be informed for what reason his correspondence had been broken off.

Oh, weak man! Well may one of our greatest writers have said, “that a weak man, who was unstable in all his ways, was a plague to mankind, a grief to his family, and a disgrace to himself.”

Yes, even at this moment, though Sandford would not do Catherine the justice to stand up for her excellence, his heart smote him for his base desertion of her: he felt almost inclined to abandon his college life and his friend, and fly to her. Happy had it been for him if he had done so; but the dread of what malicious reports his compeers might

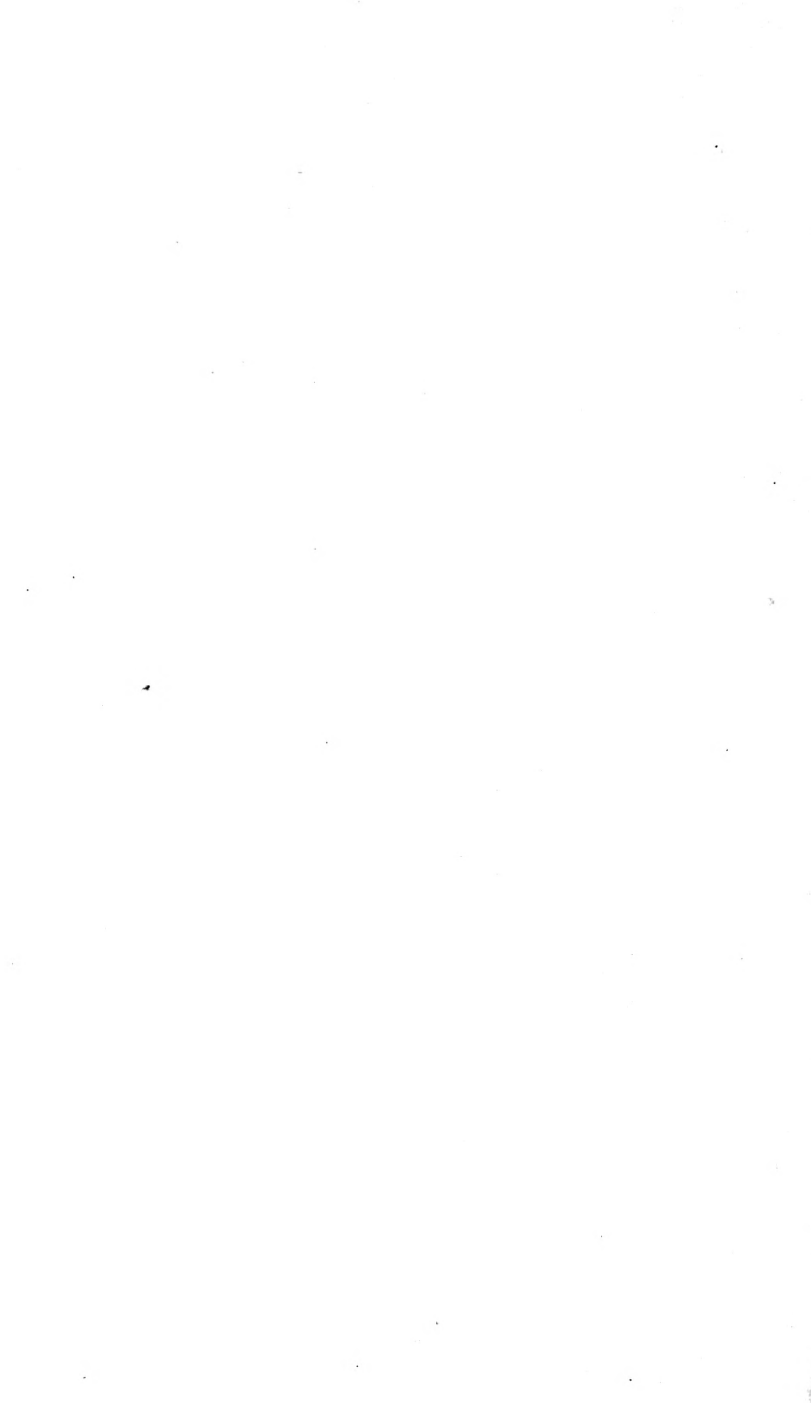
spread, and the fear of offending Mr. Hawkins, kept him from his purpose. He could not bring himself even to write to Catherine: what could he say? He felt that he had basely injured her, that he had shown how misplaced was her confidence in him, and from day to day he delayed writing to her; till at length the last day of March arrived. It was ten days, perhaps a fortnight, since he had heard from her. He felt that even her gentle spirit was roused. The thought that he had lost her for ever, well nigh drove him to distraction. And for what had he resigned her? To please a little hypocritical priest, who, to gain his own ends, had wormed himself into his confidence. Yes, he despised Hawkins, but not so much as he despised himself: he had become odious in his own eyes. If he would only have sat down and considered quietly for one minute what certain happiness he was throwing away, and that before him all was a dreary waste—that his character as a man of honour would be gone—how differently would he have acted. But he was deaf to all these better suggestions; and it really seemed as if his acquaintance with Hawkins had changed his affectionate open heart into one as cold

and reserved as that of his false friend. At once he rejected these thoughts; and in after days bitter were the regrets he felt for having had so cruelly and deeply wounded one who was so much his superior in every virtuous feeling.

Catherine, poor Catherine, was at home: she performed her daily avocations indeed; but more like one in a kind of stupor, than that bright, happy, smiling Catherine, whose every look and thought was cheerful and sunny. Had Sandford seen her, not even Mr. Hawkins could have prevented all his love returning.

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